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LOADING...

For me, few videogame franchises feel as consistent as Nintendo's *Zelda* series. Sure, you can make the argument that it has suffered from some weak spin-offs over the years and it relies heavily on largely retelling the same story (albeit in new ways) but those core adventures are always entertaining.

Nintendo's series has influenced numerous developers over the years, particularly those within the indie scene and we've spoken to several of them this month, along with other members of the *Zelda* community. Dungeon design, Hyrule's overworld and even *Zelda*'s music are all discussed, with our interviewees explaining just what makes Nintendo's franchise so fascinating to revisit.

In addition to our incredible *Zelda* coverage, we have a gigantic feature on Ocean Software, Alistair Crooks tells the forgotten story of Atari UK, we speak to Eugene Jarvis about the popular *Cruis'n* arcade series and Damiano Gerli quizzes several veterans of the computer cracking scene. We've also got exhaustive features on *Bonanza Bros* and *Gun Smoke*, a behind-the-scenes look at Images Software and we've even found time to watch Illumination's *The Super Mario Movie* and review WayForward's tremendous reboot of the *Advance Wars* GBA games.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ZELDA GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Breath Of The Wild proved that Nintendo's decades-old franchise could still turn heads. I'm currently playing the Japanese reissue with built-in DLC ahead of *Tears Of The Kingdom*'s launch.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Ocarina Of Time was the first one I played and it was a great introduction to the series. Maybe I had more fun with *The Wind Waker* though – that snot-nosed kid gets me every time.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Return To Monkey Island*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

The Wind Waker is the big one for me – I got it as a gift for my GCSE results, so I associate it with the blissful summer after leaving school.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Yooka-Laylee And The Impossible Lair*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Does *Skyrim* on the Switch count? It has Link's green outfit.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Kenshi*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

MARTYN CARROLL

Breath Of The Wild. I think I've spent more time on this than any other single-player game. My Switch here says "200 hours or more" apparently. Oh boy.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Grand Theft Auto V*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

ANDREW FISHER

A Link To The Past: my first experience of the series, and still incredibly playable.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *2021: Moon Escape*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

Tough one. But I'm going to say it's a tie between *The Wind Waker* and *A Link To The Past*.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Horace*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

RORY MILNE

I never get tired of the original. Behind its polished pixel art and presentation there's some remarkably ambitious gameplay, especially considering that it was a Famicom Disk System launch title.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Metropolis Street Racer*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

IAIN LEE

The Wind Waker. It looked absolutely magical on the GameCube. An absolutely breathtaking game.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *Gears Tactics*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

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This month, Paul learns that watching someone playing a game can be just as entertaining as playing it

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Patrick Nevian on adapting classic Chris Huelsbeck tracks to the piano

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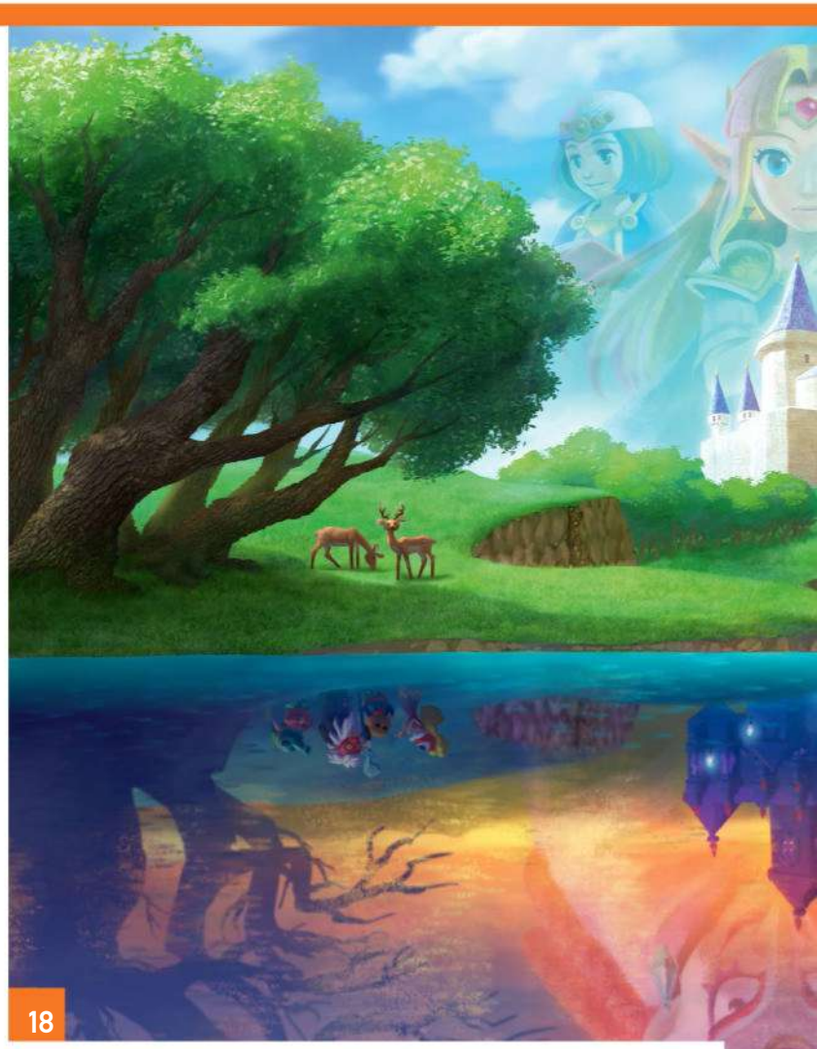

The Adventurer's Guide To The Legend Of Zelda

We quiz a host of indie developers and *Zelda* experts on why Nintendo's franchise continues to resonate with its fanbase

A Tribute To: Ocean Software

Gary Bracey recalls the hits and duds of the popular UK publisher

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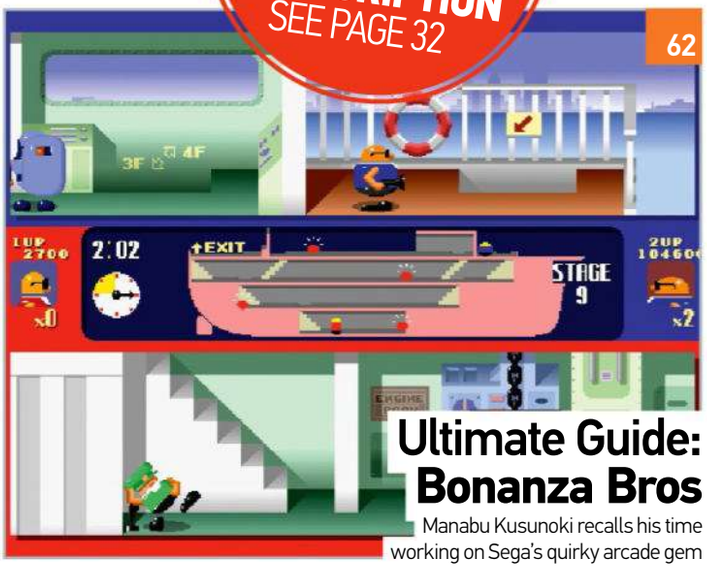

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Manabu Kusunoki recalls his time working on Sega's quirky arcade gem

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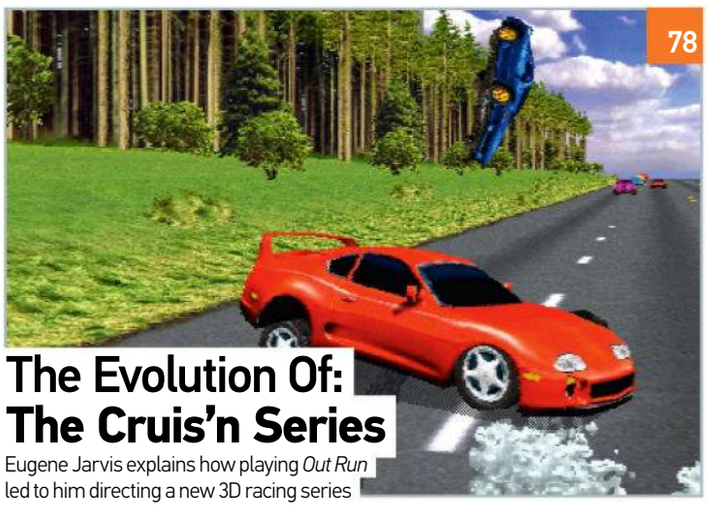

The Evolution Of: The Cruis'n Series

Eugene Jarvis explains how playing *Out Run* led to him directing a new 3D racing series

SO LONG AND FAREWELL

E3 hits the rocks as Nintendo shutters shops

» E3 was scheduled to return to its regular home, the Los Angeles Convention Center.

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It's September 2006 and Nick has been collecting all the latest news for you. He's good like that

The 2023 edition of E3 has been cancelled following the confirmation that several major companies would not be attending the event, leaving the future of the exhibition in doubt. Originally established in 1995 by the Entertainment Software Association, for many years the show was the most important games industry gathering and a venue for major announcements including new hardware, major new games and other initiatives. This year's event was to be co-organised by ReedPop, a major events company which has experience of running gaming events such as PAX and Minecraft Festival in the USA and EGX in the UK, as well as the likes of New York Comic Con, Emerald City Comic Con and MCM Comic Con. Speaking to gamesindustry.biz, also owned by ReedPop, ESA president Stanley Pierre-Louis noted that economic concerns have caused companies to "reassess how they invest in large marketing events", and that many were exploring "how to find the right balance between in-person events and digital marketing opportunities". In the time since the last in-person E3 event was held in 2019, a number of digital showcases have been established including Geoff Keighley's Summer Game Fest, the collaborative New Game+ Expo and the Future Games Show run by **Retro Gamer**'s publisher Future. This adds to the existing online showcases from platform holders including Nintendo Direct and Sony's State Of Play shows.

Though the organisers have signalled their intent to hold an E3 show in 2024, many commentators don't believe it will happen. Reacting on Twitter, former Gizmodo and Mashable journalist Christina Warren said, "E3 is effectively dead. End of an era but it's been trending this way for a decade. The biggest publishers and console makers just go direct and things like PAX took over for fans/enthusiasts. Put a cork in it, it's done." Bloomberg's Jason Schreier said, "Personally I'm bummed about it, but after leaking a bunch of people's numbers and addresses a few years ago, E3 hasn't exactly garnered a lot of love."

Time will tell if E3 does return, but one indication of how things may go in its absence came with the announcement of Nintendo Live 2023, an in-person event set to take place in Seattle during September. The Switch

» For better or worse, E3 was the venue for many memorable gaming moments.

Layton
Inquisitor Barnham, please allow me to confirm what you believe happened on the night of the crime.
Grand Grimoire
Court Record

» [3DS] At £110, *Professor Layton Vs Phoenix Wright*'s price has increased 119%.

» [Wii U] The HD version is arguably the definitive *Wind Waker* experience, and it's getting pricey.

» [3DS] *Pocket Card Jockey* was a rare non-*Pokémon* game from Game Freak, and a cult favourite.

» [Wii U] *NES Remix* received a physical release in North America, but the console is region locked.

» [Wii U] *Affordable Space Adventures* might have been affordable, but it's no longer available.

manufacturer has yet to confirm an exact date or venue, but has said that attendees will be able to enjoy live performances and competitions, tournaments, photo opportunities with Nintendo characters and of course the ability to play a variety of Switch games. With the Switch now over six years old, we wouldn't be too surprised if the event was used to host a new hardware announcement.

Speaking of Nintendo, the company closed the online eShop stores for the 3DS and the Wii U on 27 March. These closures were advertised well in advance, with Nintendo first announcing its intention to shutter the services back in February 2022, confirming the final date a few months later. Although new software cannot be purchased, owners of both consoles are still able to download any previous purchases until further notice, and online services for various games are still available.

Given that both consoles have a number of games that never received a physical release, the most major effect of the store closures is to effectively take those games out of legitimate circulation. Notable 3DS games affected include *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies*, *Liberation Maiden*, *HarmoKnight*, *Attack Of The Friday Monsters*, *Pullblox* and *Pocket Card Jockey*. On the Wii U, *Affordable Space Adventures*, the *NES Remix* games, *Mario Vs Donkey Kong: Tipping Stars*, *Dr Luigi* and *Pushmo World* are all now unavailable for purchase (although it's worth pointing out that some of these games do have region-locked physical versions in other parts of the world).

Data collected by pricecharting.com also shows that certain physical games have seen major price rises that coincide with the store closures. On the Wii U, *Kirby And The Rainbow Paintbrush* is selling for £19, which is 33% more than it did in January. At £31, *Xenoblade Chronicles X* is changing hands for 49% more than it did in February, and in the same time the going rate for *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* HD has risen by 67% to £52. On the 3DS, *7th Dragon III: Code VFD* is trading at around £95, up 25% since January, *Etrian Odyssey V: Beyond The Myth* has increased 34% since January to a price of around £174, and *Professor Layton And The Azran Legacy* has shot up to the £70 mark – a 147% increase since January.

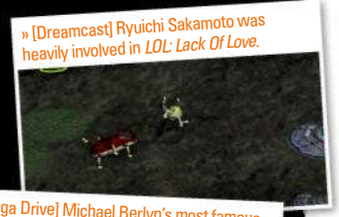
Though many great Wii U games were ported to the Switch, 3DS games mostly remain exclusive to that platform. With Nintendo having abandoned the Virtual Console model in favour of subscription-based retro offerings, buying these games for the original hardware is the only way you're likely to be able to own them for the foreseeable future, so keep a careful eye on the market and consider picking up the titles you want sooner rather than later.

» [3DS] *Attack Of The Friday Monsters* was part of the digital-only Guild02 collection.

IN MEMORIAM

Famed musician Ryuichi Sakamoto passed away on 28 March, at the age of 71. Best-known for his work as both a solo artist and a member of Yellow Magic Orchestra, Sakamoto was also a prolific soundtrack composer, earning an Oscar, a Grammy, a BAFTA and more. Sakamoto created the jingle that plays during the Dreamcast's boot sequence, and scored a number of videogames beginning with the PC Engine CD game *Tengai Makyou: Ziria* in 1989. Other works include *Seven Samurai 20XX*, *Dawn Of Mana* and *LOL: Lack Of Love*, for which he was also the scenario writer.

On 31 March, Michael Berlyn passed away at the age of 73. The industry veteran began his career in videogames in 1981 as a writer on the Apple II game *Oo-Topos*, and soon found his way to Infocom. From there, he cofounded Brainwave Creations with his wife Muffy, before moving on to roles at Electronic Arts and subsequently Accolade, where he created *Bubsy The Bobcat*. He left to create Eidetic, Inc which is now Sony's Bend Studio, but left the company during the development of *Syphon Filter*. He later returned to the industry to create casual games on mobile and PC.



» [Dreamcast] Ryuichi Sakamoto was heavily involved in *LOL: Lack Of Love*.

» [Mega Drive] Michael Berlyn's most famous creation is the Nineties platform game *Bubsy*.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

A day in the life

I feel a little dirty and I have to get something off my chest. Firstly, let me set the scene. I'm 50 this year and I live alone with my four cats. Not a great look. I do have a partner and I do have kids that come and visit whenever they feel like it. But for most of the week, it's just me and my little fluffy ones. It's a house that has both a downstairs and an upstairs. I work downstairs. Some of you may know I've quit broadcasting and now work as a full-time psychotherapist. My computer, TV and consoles are all downstairs in what is essentially my workplace.

Three weeks ago, I decided to do something I hadn't done for 20 years. And this is where it all gets a bit filthy. I bought a TV for my bedroom. De rigueur in the Nineties. Heck, I even inherited the black-and-white portable into my room when I was eight, so it's not completely new. Twenty years ago I decided having a TV and a games console (it was my N64) in the bedroom was unhealthy. It made me slovenly, unsociable. I bought into all that stuff about how the bedroom should be free from electronic gadgets if one is to get a good night's sleep. Then two weeks ago I thought 'sod it'. And I ordered a cheap and cheerful 42-incher for the bedroom. After a couple of nights of watching *Married At First Sight: Australia*, I wondered what it would be like to take this to the next level. I went on CEX to see how much it was selling the Xbox Series S for. It was £180.

> "It's funny that I now own an incredibly powerful machine and I'm mainly playing old games on it"

I'm not especially well-off but… but… but… I hit the buy button. I now have a sweet setup where I can stay up until 2am flitting between *The Apprentice* and the stuff on Game Pass. I've been a PS fanboy for the last seven or so years, so going back to Xbox has been a real revelation. I have no idea how Game Pass makes money, but I'm not going to question it. You give me those games for 'free' and I shall devour them.

It's funny that I now own an incredibly powerful machine and I'm mainly playing old games on it. I'm really getting into *Age Of Empires II* (I tried *Civilization VI* but did not have a clue what was going on, even with YouTube tutorials) and I have become addicted once more to *Halo Wars*. I'd forgotten how huge *Halo Wars* had been to me about 15 years ago. It was literally (and I literally mean literally) all I played for about two years solid. I'm having to fight the urge to be completely consumed by it again, but it's tough. I think it's invented by the same people that made Class-A drugs – so, so moreish.

Am I right to feel sullied by what I've done? Is it acceptable? Actually, I don't care. Last week me and the boys all lay in bed howling with laughter playing *Sea Of Thieves*, so yeah, I think I've done the right thing.

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Passive gaming nostalgia

I don't think any of you would criticise me for suggesting that a core part of the appeal of this magazine is nostalgia. Yes, **Retro Gamer** is also a celebration of gaming's history – and the people that helped build it – but, let's be honest, we also just love remembering the past.

Nostalgia is an emotion, one uniquely tied to our memories and positive experiences. It's a sense of longing, a desire to go back to that time, and wade into those positive experiences once more. It's also a way of connecting with our identity and sense of self. It can help rationalise who we are and where we came from, bringing a degree of stability into our lives during times of change and uncertainty. There's nothing wrong with loading up *Speedball 2* to help you through a tough time. Certainly, there are far less healthy coping mechanisms.

It would be fair to say that all of us – the world over – have had a tricky few years. My 2022 was particularly hard. My dad was ill for a long stretch of it, then sadly died. Alongside this, the rules of my day job – I write kids' TV, if you didn't know – changed, and I struggled to find work. For a long stretch of last year, I stopped playing games entirely. I couldn't find the energy to play anything. It was enough to just put one foot in front of the other each day. Frustratingly, this sudden squall of life nonsense also meant I had to pause production on a second retro-tastic series of *Digitiser The Show* for YouTube, which had been successfully crowdfunded the previous year.

And yet, oddly, I turned to watching videos of people playing old games. I found it calming, relaxing and meditative amidst a relentless maelstrom of personal change and stress. It didn't even need to be games that I'd played; I went through this run of watching obscure ZX Spectrum games, many of which I'd not even heard of. *Butcher Hill* from 1988, *Thunderceptor* from 1987… *Eddie Edwards Super Ski* from 1989…

None were particularly great games, but the screechy sound, the colour clash visuals, the loading screens dropping in line by line, were enough to give me that nostalgic rush.

And it helped, y'know. It helped more than if I had chosen to play something new and modern. Or, indeed, played anything at all. Some of those old Speccy games can be tough, and I already had enough stress going on. I just wanted to watch.

It felt safe, comforting, warm – even relaxing. An oasis of the familiar in unfamiliar circumstances, a sort of undefinable certainty; they had happened. They weren't going to hit me with any unpleasant surprises.

For the record, things are looking up now. I seem to be over the worst of what we went through last year. I still miss my dad, I'm still shaken by his final months and the sudden hiccup in my career, but I'm coping. I'm working again – writing scripts and resuming production on that new series of *Digi Level 2*. And a big part of getting here was being able to enjoy my gaming nostalgia passively.

> "Some of those old Speccy games can be tough, and I already had enough stress going on"

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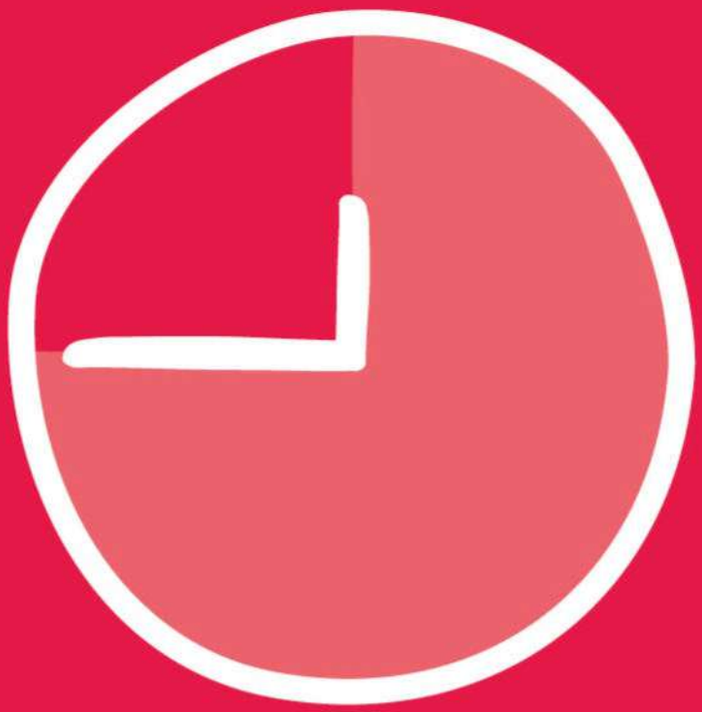

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Patrick Nevian has created two CDs of piano-based compositions of Chris Huelsbeck's music.

» The USB device holding the new collection of tunes sports Chris Huelsbeck's signature.

Patrick Nevian

We speak to the pianist behind a new collection of piano-themed Chris Huelsbeck classics

If you were to list the many great composers for the Commodore 64, we'd imagine that Chris Huelsbeck would be high on your list. His fantastic videogame compositions have regularly been turned into CDs and even vinyl records over the years. One of the most memorable collections is *Chris Huelsbeck – The Piano Collection & Limited Score Book*, a popular Kickstarter project that raised over $73,000 and featured brand-new compositions of Chris' work by pianist Patrick Nevian. Patrick is now back with a second collection of piano-based melodies specifically chosen by Chris' many fans and he was keen to explain how the new project came about.

> "I would say that Turrican, Jim Power and Apidya are the essence of a classic Huelsbeck track"
> **PATRICK NEVIAN**

Hi Patrick, tell us how you first came into contact with Chris Huelsbeck.
In 2008 I recorded a few Amiga songs on the piano just for fun. I then presented this to the English Amiga Board community. Soon the entire project quickly developed a momentum of its own and the users approached me with more and more requests as to which Amiga classic I should play and record next. This eventually resulted in two free albums: *Amiga Meets Piano 1&2*.

Is that how Chris found out about you?
That's right. Chris became aware of this and wrote to me. He had wanted to make a piano album for a long time, but so far he hadn't found a suitable pianist who could translate the specific feeling of his compositions to the piano.

It seems you were just the person Chris was looking for...
Since we got along right away, a great and very friendly co-operation began.

Chris has been very prolific over the years. Which of Chris' tracks best sums up his work for you?
I would say that *Turrican*, *Jim Power* and *Apidya* are the essence of a classic Huelsbeck track. But an artist is always

» The new album features 18 tracks that cover everything from *Turrican's Victory* to *Tunnel B1*'s intro music.

» You can order Patrick's new collection by visiting thepianocollection.com

» [Amiga] Patrick's rendition of the title theme for *Jim Power In Mutant Planet* is rather lovely.

» A shot of Patrick in the studio, alongside a bunch of finished CDs that are ready for posting.

» [Amiga] *Meadow's Edge* is a fantastic track from *Apidya* and it opens the new collection.

» [C64] Fans of *The Great Giana Sisters* will be pleased to hear one of the game's tracks made the final selection.

evolving, so the current songs are great works as well. I know this from my own productions for my band Blue May Rose, videogames or other bands. Fans are often used to the old classics and love them. But there is often a lot of experience and love in new things that are worth discovering.

Why did you decide to focus on requests for *Chris Huelsbeck – The Piano Collection Vol 2 – The Players Choice*?

After we had a very successful Kickstarter project with the first *Piano Collection*, I wanted to go back to the fans for the second album. For a few years now, I've had the idea that users should actually be asked what their favourite pieces by Chris are. The pandemic was just right for me: I wasn't on tour and I was in the studio all the time anyway. I started some polls in Amiga forums and compiled a poll list from the results. I think it turned out to be a fantastic playlist. Thanks again for that!

How long has each composition taken you to create?

For me it's all about the feeling! I sit down at the piano and just play. I don't take notes or plan an arrangement. I love free interpretation and improvisation. It's always super exciting that you can arrange songs of any genre in so many ways. This is how different versions are created on the fly, where I choose the parts that I like best. Such a process can take an hour or even a few days, depending on whether I'm still missing something or what I still want to express.

How difficult has it been to convert Chris' music to the piano and why has his music had such a long life outside of its original medium?

The complexity of his compositions varies, but they are very complex, with key changes, many different melodic progressions, etc. I think that's also the secret why his pieces of music still work so well. They are varied and catchy at the same time.

What does the piano bring to Chris' compositions, and what (if anything) can sometimes be lost?

There are no SID and Paula sounds [laughs]. Seriously: of course it's something completely different, but you can tell the quality of a good composition by the fact that you can create your very own piano world from it.

Do you have any further collaborations with Chris planned for the future?

Chris recently delivered a great Eighties-style remix of *Why Anna* for Blue May Rose, which I'm really excited about. So there's that for fans to look forward to.

So now that the new collection is finally complete, are there any other ideas that you're currently working on?

There will definitely be more great collaborations in the future and I'm really looking forward to that!

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

» [PSP] *Tekken*'s smooth 3D fighting in the palm of your hand felt miraculous at the time.

SEPTEMBER 2006 – It's a big month for PSP owners and a dry month for pretty much everybody else, as the software drought continues. Nick Thorpe takes time out from revisiting his first-year student flat to check out the hottest games of the past

NT

NEWS SEPTEMBER 2006

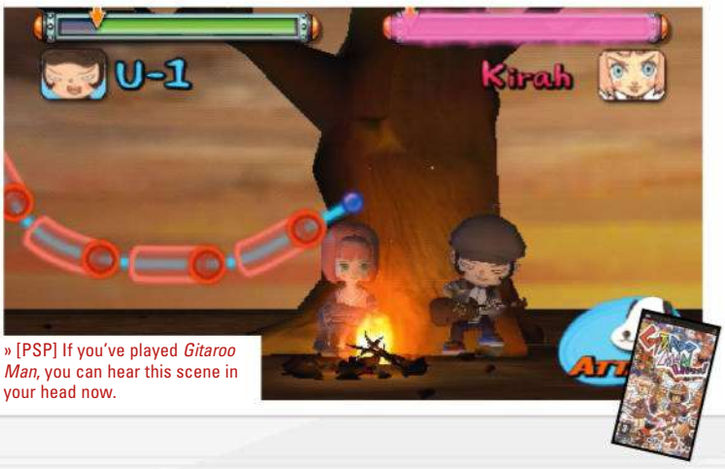
On 4 September, conservationist and TV presenter Steve Irwin died at the age of 44. The Australian had risen to international prominence as the host of shows such as *The Crocodile Hunter*, and was killed when a stingray barb pierced his chest during the filming of the TV series *Ocean's Deadliest*. A public memorial ceremony was held at Australia Zoo on 30 September, and is estimated to have been viewed by as many as 300 million people online.

Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted in a military coup on 19 September. The junta alleged that Shinawatra, who was elected in 2001, had been a corrupt leader who had abused his power. Martial law, suppression of political activities and press censorship soon followed, but the country held a new general election in December 2007.

TV presenter Richard Hammond was left badly injured on 20 September while filming a segment for *Top Gear*. The right front tyre of the Vampire dragster he was driving failed, causing the vehicle to go out of control and roll over several times, Hammond spent two weeks in a medically induced coma and would struggle for years with amnesia and depression due to the brain injuries from the accident.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2006

Sony promised console-quality games on the go with the PSP, and this month Namco really stepped up to deliver on that with *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*. The updated version of *Tekken 5* earned 10/10 from the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, which declared it, "The first landmark PSP game." *Go Play* gave it 94%, praising the visuals and "genuine, honest-to-goodness, interesting unlockables", while *Play* gave it 92% and noted that "there was never a problem with any of the buttons' responses", contrasting it with previous PSP fighting games. *Edge* and *games™* both awarded it 7/10, but for different reasons – the former felt that the series had become "unable to innovate" but that there would "always be a place for quality like this", while the latter lamented juddering performance.



» [PSP] If you've played *Gitaroo Man*, you can hear this scene in your head now.

Gitaroo Man Lives!, a revised PSP port of the cult favourite PS2 rhythm action game, earned a set of solid reviews – 89% from *Go Play*, 8/10 from *games™* and 8/10 from *Official PS2*. *Go Play* noted that "some of the more demanding button sequences have been toned down a little" compared to the PS2 version, while *games™* felt that "PSP's nub actually improves the *Gitaroo Man* experience" because the added accuracy makes players "far less likely to misjudge the angle of a guitar section". *Official PS2* claimed that, "Blasting evil with a squealing solo is as satisfying as gaming gets," but cautioned that the game is "bloody hard" and that there isn't much extra content for owners of the PS2 version.

Also on the PSP, Capcom terrorised the unskilled with *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins*. This series revival earned 9/10 from *Edge*, which praised the inclusion of "power-ups which substantially change the way you play", such as

"a special shield and winged suit of armour, which almost turns the game into a free-scrolling shooter". *Go Play* was also impressed by that, and noted that "the hardcore gameplay still remains for those who want the challenge", awarding the game 91%. *Gangs Of London*, a spin-off of *The Getaway*, didn't fare so well. *Go Play* gave it 80%, praising the variety but criticising the "wonky aiming" and advising players to look to *Grand Theft Auto* games instead.

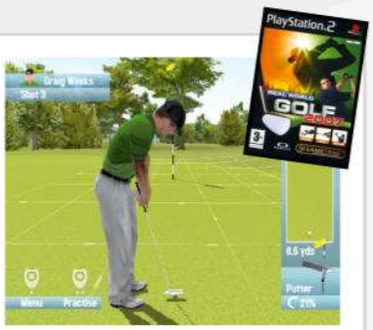
If you were playing anything other than a PSP, you had precious little of interest on the shelves this month. After a decent first half of the year, the Xbox release schedule had dwindled significantly, to the point that *Official Xbox Magazine* contains just one review – the Pixar movie tie-in *Cars*, which earned 5.8/10. The GameCube version scored 64% in *Official Nintendo Magazine*, the PS2 version earned 7/10 in *Official PS2* and the PSP version received 60% from *Play*, which said that "kids will like it" but that it "doesn't show any ambition or take any risks". PS2 owners could enjoy *Real World Golf 2007*, which used the Gametrak motion sensor and earned 7/10 from *Official PS2*, or *Singstar Anthems* which got the same score from *Official PS2* and was described as "the campest thing you can buy for your PS2 this side of a little sailor's hat".

With nothing of interest on the UK schedules for Nintendo's handhelds, that just left the PC to make the month more interesting. While *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* had already appeared on consoles, the PC port was the joint best-reviewed new game of the month in *PC Gamer*, scoring 88% for being "the best arcade racer on the PC in living memory". The other high scorer was *Armadillo Run*, an indie physics-based puzzle game that encouraged players to experiment and come up with unexpected ways to get the titular animal to safety.

More divisive was *Darkstar One*, a "flying around, shooting and occasionally trading in space game" which *PC Gamer* quite liked "despite there being 500,000 instances of this particular genre"

» [PC] *Darkstar One* wasn't original, and its worth depended on who you were reading back then.

» [PSP] Despite the series' reputation, *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* is supposedly slightly more forgiving.



» [PS2] *Real World Golf 2007*'s developers were probably pleased it was released ahead of *Wii Sports*.

because of its "broad scope and sense of ambition". That was enough to earn it 80%, which was considerably higher than the *games™* score of 5/10. The multiformat mag said that the combat was great but that "essentially it's the same five minutes of entertainment repeated over and over again" and "it's difficult to see the point of having 300 systems to visit when they're all exactly the same".

Join us again next time – it'll be the last one without any new consoles to talk about.

CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 2006

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Over The Hedge (Activision)
2 – Pirates Of The Caribbean: The Legend Of Jack Sparrow (Ubisoft)
3 – 2006 FIFA World Cup (EA)
4 – Hitman: Blood Money (Eidos)
5 – Tomb Raider: Legend (Eidos)

PSP

1 – Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (Buena Vista)
2 – Cars (THQ)
3 – Formula One 06 (Sony)
4 – Tomb Raider: Legend (Eidos)
5 – Miami Vice: The Game (Vivendi)

DS

1 – New Super Mario Bros (Nintendo)
2 – Dr Kawashima's Brain Training (Nintendo)
3 – Nintendogs: Dalmatian & Friends (Nintendo)
4 – Animal Crossing: Wild World (Nintendo)
5 – Over The Hedge (Activision)

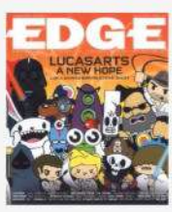
MUSIC

1 – I Don't Feel Like Dancin' (Scissor Sisters)
2 – Sexyback (Justin Timberlake)
3 – London Bridge (Fergie)
4 – Promiscuous (Nelly Furtado feat Timbaland)
5 – When You Were Young (The Killers)

THIS MONTH IN...

Next3

"The future has arrived," proclaims the cover of the UK's first PS3 magazine. The only problem is, it hasn't – the magazine has launched so far ahead of the console that the first import game reviews are in issue six.



Edge

"There's something profoundly wrong about the way our industry deals with women," says David Cage. "It's a very simplistic vision created by moronic teenagers for moronic teenagers." Yes, it's *that* David Cage.

Official Xbox Magazine

This month, readers are asked "Would you buy a Microsoft handheld console?" 20% say yes, 40% say no, 30% will only consider it if it works with the Xbox 360, and the sensible 10% say they'll wait until they see it.

Spatter

TRY THE TRICKY TRICYCLE

» ARCADE » 1984 » SEGA R&D1

One of the things I love about this hobby is the sheer number of games that are out there to be enjoyed. After collecting videogames for decades and working on well over a hundred issues of **Retro Gamer**, there's still plenty of room for discovery and new experiences. *Spatter* is a great example – the original arcade game was completely unknown to me until last year, when Sega and M2 decided to include a conversion on the Mega Drive Mini 2. Reportedly, staff at M2 had programmed the conversion just because they liked the game, about a decade before the mini-console was in the works.

I'm glad they did, because *Spatter* has become a game I really enjoy. It's a maze game in which you control San, a little guy on a tricycle who needs to collect all of the flowers in each stage, with marauding enemies predictably attempting to impede his efforts. What I particularly like about it is that you get more in the way of evasive and offensive options than in most maze games. San can jump over oncoming adversaries, and you'll notice that when he does the fence beside him bulges outward, which can be used to defeat enemies on the other side of the barricade. If you want a frontal attack, the bricks littered around the stage can be fired forward, but there's a limited supply of them.

The game brings to mind *Flicky*, an arcade game of the same vintage that I also discovered via the Mega Drive – maybe if that conversion had been a roaring success, more arcade games like *Spatter* would have received accurate 16-bit outings. M2's passion for the game gave me a taste of that alternate history and a new addition to my list of arcade favourites, so I'm hoping that sharing my own enthusiasm will turn some of you on to this relatively obscure little gem too.

THE ADVENTURER'S GUIDE TO

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

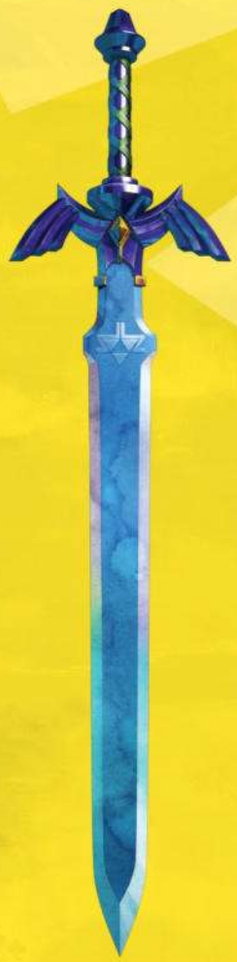
FOR DECADES, THE LEGEND OF ZELDA HAS BEEN A NAME SYNONYMOUS WITH QUALITY IN THE ACTION ADVENTURE GENRE, AND ONE OF NINTENDO'S MOST POPULAR SERIES. WE TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE QUALITIES THAT MAKE LINK'S ADVENTURES SO TIMELESS

WORDS BY ALAN WEN AND NICK THORPE

In the grand pantheon of Nintendo series, there's no question that *The Legend Of Zelda* ranks as one of the elite. While Mario has the bigger sales overall, Link's adventures have proven just as dependable for the Japanese giant – the series has made appearances on every major Nintendo console and handheld platform, and provided the tent pole launch games for the company's two most successful home consoles. It's also a series that continues to grow as the most recent entry in the series, *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild*, is one of the very few videogames ever to sell over 30 million copies.

It's safe to say that players love *Zelda*, and the series has stayed in their hearts and minds for decades because of its incredible consistency. Start up the original NES game or jump into *Breath Of The Wild*, and the sense of boundless possibility is the same as you're thrust into a wide-open world with little imperative but to explore. In practically every game in the series, you'll run into enemies like Octoroks and Armos statues, and you'll pay frequent visits to places like Hyrule Castle and Death Mountain. If you first encountered the series in the Eighties, it has grown up with you, and if you came in later you can explore past games without them feeling alien.

What's more remarkable is that such consistency has been achieved without sacrificing versatility. The *Zelda* series is capable of great tonal changes, which are clearly the result of deliberate design choices rather than being part of a gradual shift – just think back to the contrast between the unsettling pre-apocalyptic setting of *Majora's Mask*, the bright and breezy cartoon aesthetic of its immediate successor *The Wind Waker* and the darker and more serious tone of the next game, *Twilight Princess*. No matter your taste, there's probably a *Zelda* to match it.



Of course, the series keeps a large proportion of its fans from game to game, because the plot and aesthetic choices are always underpinned by rock-solid action adventure game design. Almost every game in the series has received overwhelming critical acclaim, with the original recognised as a revolutionary game that set the foundations for later action RPGs, and *Ocarina Of Time* likewise for transitioning the action adventure into 3D so successfully, providing a template for other developers to learn from during the formative years of 3D game design.

Over the coming pages, we'll be celebrating the *Zelda* series with developers and fans that have been inspired by the franchise. From its world and its inhabitants to the challenges that stand between Link and his heroic destiny, as well as the tools that he uses to overcome them, we'll be taking a deep dive into what makes it tick – and by the end, no matter whether you prefer 2D or 3D games and regardless of which atmosphere suits you best, we're sure you'll be raring to start your next adventure with Link.

INTERVIEWEES

CONNOR PATRICK QUINN
■ Artist and director, *Lil Gator Game*

SCOTT SULCHER
■ Lead developer, *Lil Gator Game*

ROB MAHER
■ Lead developer, *Blossom Tales*

GREG LOBANOV
■ Lead developer, *Wandersong* and *Chicory: A Colorful Tale*

MELOS HAN-TANI
■ Co-creator and musician, *Anodyne*

JEREMY HARVEY
■ Co-host, *Chat Of The Wild* podcast

NICOLAS CANNASSE
■ Creator and game director, ***Evoland***

World of Wonder

HYRULE IS ALWAYS UNIQUELY SUITED TO THE ZELDA GAMES THAT TAKE PLACE THERE - BUT THAT'S BECAUSE OF NINTENDO'S UNUSUAL APPROACH TO CRAFTING THE LOCATION. WE TALK TO JEREMY HARVEY ABOUT WHAT MAKES ZELDA'S SETTING SUCH A JOY TO DISCOVER

Adventurers are nothing without a place to explore, and in the *Zelda* series that usually means Hyrule – while it isn't the setting for every game in the series, it is the central setting that is most frequently revisited and the one that most players could name. It is just as much a part of the series iconography as Link, Zelda, Ganon, the Triforce or the Master Sword.

Despite the consistency with which it appears in the *Zelda* games, Hyrule itself is anything but consistent. With the *Zelda* games taking place in multiple timelines and centuries apart, it's no surprise that it would undergo more changes than some other famous videogame locations. However, that's not the only way to explain the variance. "Personally, I still like the idea of [the games] being a legend – I would love it if one day we actually get to meet the storyteller of all of these legends," says Jeremy Harvey of the *Chat Of The Wild* podcast. "You have bits and pieces that connect, but like in your own imagination, where you try to remember how things were, places are further or closer than they actually were." One benefit of this approach to the setting is that it allows Nintendo to be flexible not only with the stories it tells, but the game design that accompanies them. "It's actually really interesting the way that they try to do that. When you take something like the original *The Legend Of Zelda* as well as *Breath Of The Wild*, where they give you just the biggest room to run around in with the sole purpose of allowing you to explore, while something like *Skyward Sword* intentionally funnels you into places and feels tight, it's all for a purpose," says Jeremy. "I don't necessarily look at either one as not accomplishing something, they are going about it differently and trying to make you feel something different."

» [N64] Kakariko Village is usually a fairly peaceful place inhabited by good, ordinary folk.

Whether Nintendo splits the world into light and dark sides as in *A Link To The Past* or floods the world as in *The Wind Waker*, Hyrule usually remains recognisable thanks to landmark locations. "I feel that it comes back to the legend point," says Jeremy. "You have these landmarks that really stand out, and what happens with those landmarks is largely different. Outside of us always knowing the Gorons are going to be at Death Mountain, something like Kakariko Village will have different people there, will be in different states, but we remember Kakariko Village." This particular example is of personal significance to Jeremy. "Even when I played *Twilight Princess*, when I first went into there and it said this is Kakariko Village it tugged at my heartstrings, because I just had this feeling – it looks nothing like the *Ocarina* version – but simply it being a name and it appearing on there made you feel like you knew this place already."

Link does take occasional adventures away from Hyrule, visiting locations like Koholint Island in *Link's Awakening*, but always ends up coming back. Why is that? "I feel like it's more a fear from the developers of making something that's too different, that doesn't appeal to a certain audience," replies Jeremy. "There have been times that they leave, we go to some alternate version like Termina or what we saw in the DS game, and those most people don't talk about, it's not something notable and we kind of leave immediately after that. I think there's something there where the developers are just maybe too risk averse to drastically change what *Zelda* is because for most people, *Zelda* is Hyrule."

» [Wii] Hyrule Castle is rarely visited for long, but usually has great plot significance.

But that familiarity is no bad thing, and Jeremy is certainly enamoured with Hyrule as a setting too. "At this point, we say Hyrule – it can look completely different from everything else – but it's like coming home, right? It's a long enough time in between these games that we yearn to go back home, especially for myself and a lot of the people that are obsessed with *Zelda* like we are," he says. "Whenever you just start *Ocarina Of Time* again, and after getting out of the forest and then just going into that field, it just feels like you're coming home."

» [NES] Death Mountain was Ganon's original home, but Gorons usually live there today.

» [SNES] The introduction of a mirrored world brought a new dimension to *A Link To The Past*.

» [Game Boy] Adventures outside of Hyrule, like *Link's Awakening*, tend to garner less fan discussion.

» [N64] Hyrule Field offers a sense of freedom at the outset of many *Zelda* adventures.

» [NES] Forests are a common sight in Hyrule – expect to fight plenty of critters.

Q&A
NICOLAS CANNASSE

EVOLAND'S CREATOR OPENS UP ON ZELDA'S OPEN WORLDS

Why do you think *Zelda*'s overworld is so fun to explore?
There's a lot of sense of exploration in a *Zelda* overworld. First there's different distinct areas which you can explore individually, but also you are not very limited in the order in which you can discover them. It's also full of secrets and surprises, so the exploration, and in general, the player's curiosity, is rewarded.

***Zelda* games often contain two dual worlds. Did this influence the changing worlds of *Evoland*?**
Yes definitely, I remember classics like *A Link To The Past* which had this Dark World where you could teleport between the two and use it to access secrets, that was very fun. It's a great way to have a more complex way to travel between worlds. Who would not love to be able to do that?

What's the most impressive *Zelda* overworld you've encountered and why?
I'm personally a big fan of *The Wind Waker*. Having the world divided into islands which you can freely navigate and explore really felt awesome the first time I played it.

What do the 3D overworlds of *Zelda* offer compared to their 2D counterparts?
In a 3D *Zelda* you have to use your camera to get insight about secrets that you can't reach yet, or access some places that were not visible by default. That's a very good tool to hide secrets, and also create a sense of being actually part of the world. On the other hand, a 2D top-down view is always perfect for complex puzzles! That's why in *Evoland* we enjoyed going from 2D to 3D, so we could use the best parts of both to create a unique experience.

INTRIGUING INHABITANTS

WHAT IS A WORLD WITHOUT THE PEOPLE IN IT? LIL GATOR GAME DEVELOPERS SCOTT SULCHER AND CONNOR PATRICK QUINN DISCUSS THE FAMILIAR AND ECCENTRIC CHARACTERS THAT INHABIT HYRULE AND HOW THEY MAKE THE LEGEND OF ZELDA'S STORIES AND QUESTS MEMORABLE

Almost every *Zelda* title revolves around Link, Zelda and Ganon, but while that is essentially the legend being retold time and time again, it would be a disservice to ignore the large cast of characters that populate Hyrule that have their own roles to play in your growth into becoming a hero. Even in the original *The Legend Of Zelda*, who can forget the old man in the cave and his single iconic line, "It's dangerous to go alone! Take this," before giving you your sword.

But from *A Link To The Past* onwards, we've also seen a growing cast of familiar races and recurring characters that are almost expected to return with each retelling of the legend in a way that's nearly unique to the series.

"Any game that runs for as long as the *Zelda* series has different liberties that it can take compared to a game that only comes out once," says Connor Patrick Quinn, writer and art director of *Lil Gator Game*. "So in any sequel, you're gonna see everybody's favourite characters. I think that the familiarity increases everyone's joy with the series, it gives you something to latch on to, no matter what weird mechanics they're going for this time. It's marketable, mostly, but I think the people who write the characters are as invested in them as much as fans are."

Although the *Zelda* timeline is at best tenuous and messy, it's nonetheless fascinating to see how certain characters evolve with each instalment, such as Impa, Zelda's guardian, who was first designed as an elderly woman who actually only appeared originally in the instruction manuals but was reimagined as a bad-ass bodyguard in *Ocarina Of Time* (all the more so in spin-off *Hyrule Warriors*), while a bit of both identities are depicted in *Skyward Sword*. But perhaps more interesting are the recurring characters who return time and again the same.

"The ones that stick out the most to me are Tingle and Beedle, even the Happy Mask Salesman, because they're just so weird!" says *Lil Gator Game*'s lead developer and programmer Scott Sulcher. "We kind of based one of the characters in our game off of that kind of weird-guy archetype."

"They have the same name, the same design, they do the same thing, and that's interesting!" Connor adds. "It's interesting that, as far as main characters go, they pay a lot more attention to revising them to fit the content and the timeline. But these weird little guys on the side do the same thing, and we love them for it."

That's not to say that *Zelda* games are just a constant rehash of old ideas. Interestingly, both Connor and Scott's favourite *Zelda* titles are unique in introducing new one-off races, respectively the Minish in *The Minish Cap* and the Twili in *Twilight Princess*. These were also instalments both praised for having refreshing takes on guides that had a personality and arc, which also offer resistance to Link as opposed to the usual respect and admiration you're garlanded with throughout your adventures.

But even in minor roles, the support characters in *Zelda* feel unique in the way they're tied to the game's quests, especially ones that are known to stretch throughout the course of the game, from the item-trading sequence in *Link's Awakening* to helping out every character over the course of the three repeating days of *Majora's Mask*.

Sometimes it's just a case of feeding into the desire to have collectibles, but even the Gratitude Crystals quest in *Skyward Sword* has a personal element to it as you're helping the demon Batreaux become human but also helping the inhabitants of Skyloft, such as playing matchmaker. That's despite your ulterior motive being to gain Rupees, Heart Containers, or any other reward.

"Characters aren't as important for that as the sense of progression," says Connor. "If you've got a cool story to tell, I might stop and listen to it. But getting things is motivating. It's an important part of any videogame."

Scott notes there's a fine balance and conflict between designing memorable characters that also fulfil a function, especially when peeled back these NPCs may just be glorified quest givers. "More dialogue doesn't necessarily make a character more interesting in any way; sometimes a character is one-note or just one joke, but that's all you need," he says. "[For *Lil Gator Game*] we wanted to make sure that every character had some sort of joke or mechanic to them that made them worth your time."

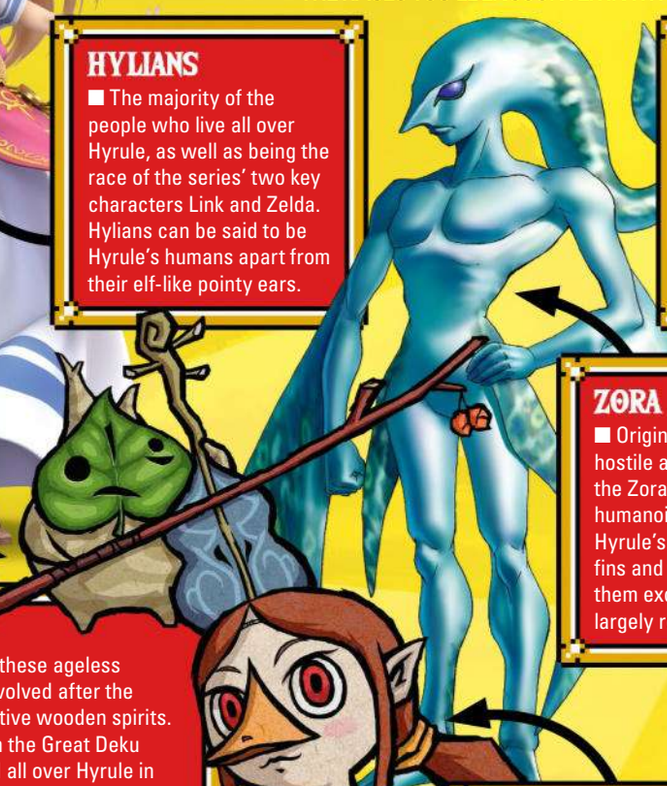
"People don't remember collecting Korok Seeds or collecting Mysterious Shells, but they do remember the story," says Connor. "But the thing that got them in between those good story elements was the little knick-knacks they collected. If you don't have anything in between, you don't get there and nobody experiences that story."

HYRULE'S INHABITANTS

THE RACES YOU'LL ENCOUNTER IN HYRULE'S HISTORY

HYLIANS

■ The majority of the people who live all over Hyrule, as well as being the race of the series' two key characters Link and Zelda. Hylians can be said to be Hyrule's humans apart from their elf-like pointy ears.



SHEIKAH

■ The Sheikah are a secretive tribe who largely existed in ancient times as a technologically advanced civilisation. Although they are traditionally the chosen protectors of the goddess Hylia's mortal incarnation (ie Zelda), there's also a separate evil faction, the Yiga Clan.

ZORA

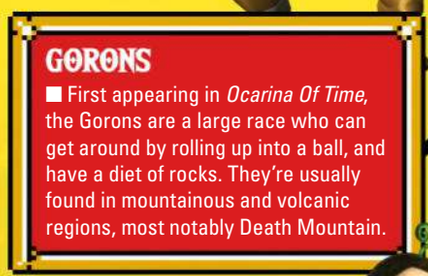
■ Originally encountered as hostile amphibious enemies, the Zora evolved into a more humanoid race with close ties to Hyrule's royal family. With gills, fins and webbed feet that make them excellent swimmers, they largely reside in Zora's Domain.

KOROKS

■ Originally the Kokiri, these ageless children of the forest evolved after the Great Flood into diminutive wooden spirits. While still residing with the Great Deku Tree, they can be found all over Hyrule in *Breath Of The Wild*.

RITO

■ Evolved from the Zora after the Great Flood (although both races exist in *Breath Of The Wild*), Rito have bird-like features including wings that allow them to fly, making them ideal post carriers. In *The Wind Waker*, earning their wings is a rite of passage.



GORONS

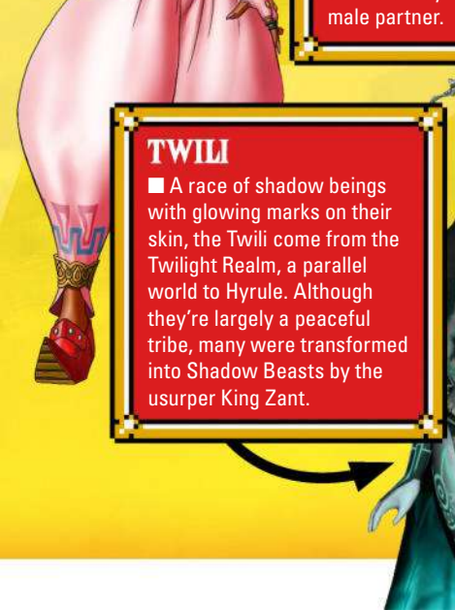
■ First appearing in *Ocarina Of Time*, the Gorons are a large race who can get around by rolling up into a ball, and have a diet of rocks. They're usually found in mountainous and volcanic regions, most notably Death Mountain.

GERUDO

■ A desert-dwelling race comprised almost entirely of women, with only one male Gerudo born apparently once every hundred years. Some Gerudo have taken to travelling beyond the desert to become merchants, and as a way to find a male partner.

KIKWI

■ These furry, pear-shaped creatures reside in Faron Woods beneath the clouds in the world of *Skyward Sword*. They're also a fairly cowardly bunch, with a bud on their backsides turning into a leafy bush that helps them hide from danger.



TWILI

■ A race of shadow beings with glowing marks on their skin, the Twili come from the Twilight Realm, a parallel world to Hyrule. Although they're largely a peaceful tribe, many were transformed into Shadow Beasts by the usurper King Zant.

MINISH

■ Also known as Picori, these are tiny pointy-eared mouse-like beings no larger than the size of your thumb. Minish dwell in forests, in the mountains, while those with an affinity for humans can also be found in towns.

HUMANS

■ Technically, Hylians aren't humans because they have pointy ears. There are a few rare instances however where you encounter humans with round ears, such as the Ordonians in *Twilight Princess* as well as the characters in *Link's Awakening* – but then Koholint Island isn't Hyrule.

DUNGEON DELVING

NO GAMES DO DUNGEONS QUITE LIKE DUNGEONS IN ZELDA, OFTEN THE GAMES' HIGHLIGHTS THAT CHALLENGE YOU WITH EXPLORATION, PUZZLES AND COMBAT IN PERFECT BALANCE. BLOSSOM TALES DEVELOPER ROB MAHER DISCUSSES THE RECIPE BEHIND THE ZELDA SERIES' UNIQUE DUNGEON DESIGNS

When we think of dungeons in videogames, it's usually associated with RPGs, as you fight hordes of enemies while seeking valuable gear and loot, such is the case with dungeon crawlers. But dungeons in the context of *The Legend Of Zelda* are their own unique recipe. They're the main event, crystallising all of the game's fundamentals in labyrinthine structures that challenge you with exploration, puzzles and combat.

"*Zelda* dungeons can be linear, while some allow for exploration by giving [the player] optional rooms, overlapping paths, obstacles they can't get through and they're not really sure how, until they get an item farther down and then it clicks in their head that they can come back to this spot they couldn't progress before," says Rob Maher, co-creator of the *Blossom Tales* series. "If I had to pick one defining element to *Zelda* dungeons, it would be that you're getting an ability and then you're able to use that ability to open up barriers."

While the *Blossom Tales* games are heavily inspired by the top-down 2D *Zelda* games, Rob admits his first proper *Zelda* game was *Ocarina Of Time*. "I didn't grow up playing with SNES, so when I got to play *A Link To The Past* at friends' houses, I didn't really get to dig into it," he explains. "In college, when I was starting to get into game development and programming frameworks, I played it all the way through just because I wanted to see exactly what that formula was back then, and it turns out it's really very similar to the modern *Zelda*s."

It's not just that you'll find recurring items in both 2D and 3D games, such as the bow, bombs, or Hookshot, and that they're often important in solving specific puzzles as well as being handy against enemies, but they also stick to a well-honed template of how you explore a dungeon. Typically, the first few rooms you're navigating the unknown until you eventually discover the dungeon map, then a compass, before finding a new item, and of course the key to the boss. "I feel like a lot of games that give you a mini-map means there's

BRAVE NEW WORLD

HOW NINTENDO INTRODUCED ZELDA'S 3D DUNGEONS

A HELPFUL GUIDE

■ 3D can be daunting for new players. Luckily, Navi is available to guide you when you get stuck and help you look at old puzzles in ways you might not have considered. Listen to her often.

LOOKS FAMILIAR

■ Moving away from 2D designs meant having new ways to approach dungeons. The ability to look around your brand-new three-dimensional world proved to be a godsend and is still helpful in new *Zelda* games.

EXPANDING ITEMS

■ Items like the Fairy Slingshot were not only required to master the dungeon you found them in (just like earlier *Zelda* games), but also made it much easier to navigate the new 3D environments.

» [N64] The Great Deku Tree is not only a living dungeon, but a great way of understanding *Zelda*'s new 3D world.

a lot of staring at the mini-map," says Rob. "*Zelda* forces the player to actually look at the physical world that you're in first so that they build a mental model in their head."

Similar to other dungeon crawlers, rewards are just as prized in a *Zelda* dungeon. But while you might find Rupees or Heart Pieces, the most valuable find is usually a new item that lets you progress further in the dungeon, even if a cynic might call it a glorified keycard. "It is kind of a key card because it lets you through a barrier," Rob concedes. "But hiding that from the player behind a bunch of stuff, that's part of the real challenge in a *Zelda* dungeon. It's the invisible hand of the developer that guides you along, as you get a key that doesn't feel like a key, and you're exploring and putting things together."

Another common element with *Zelda* dungeons are its aesthetic themes, with Rob saying *Ocarina*'s Forest Temple is his favourite. It's perhaps why the Divine Beasts in *Breath Of The Wild* disappointed traditional fans as dungeons. "When I think of a dungeon, I think of it more of an abstract thing, which is just a big puzzle," says Rob. "I think the big disconnect with people was that each of the designs of the Divine Beasts follow the same sort of aesthetics, without as strong environmental themes."

Take a step back however, and one might also argue that the overworld is itself like a dungeon, which certainly felt the case with the areas beneath the clouds in *Skyward Sword*, before being realised as a whole open-world sandbox in *Breath Of The Wild*. "A big part of any *Zelda* dungeon is giving the player something new to progress through the game," Rob agrees. "Even if it's not in the dungeon, there are items and mechanics that let the player unlock the game world. You might be in the middle of a dungeon where you get an item that makes you think of how you can progress through a part of town. It expands the player's mental model of the game world." ▶

EASY NAVIGATION

■ Despite utilising a slick new 3D look, navigating *Zelda*'s new dungeons was always easy thanks to Nintendo's insistence on making maps exceptionally easy to follow. It's hard to get lost in most 3D *Zelda* dungeons.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

■ The new dimension not only introduced new puzzle mechanics for *Zelda*'s dungeons, but could also make puzzles easier to solve as you could often look at them from a variety of new angles.

BOLD BOSSES

■ *Zelda*'s boss battles have always been a delight to experience, but the move to 3D often makes the encounters feel even more special. Gohma is a great example as it really makes full use of its large 3D chamber.

ICONIC ARSENAL

BOMBS AND BOWS, BOOMERANGS AND BIG SWORDS - LINK'S WEAPONRY ALLOWS HIM TO THRIVE IN ENCOUNTERS WITH HIS MANY FOES, BUT NINTENDO HAS ALWAYS ENSURED THAT THE EQUIPMENT HE GATHERS HAS SIGNIFICANCE FAR BEYOND ITS OBVIOUS APPLICATION IN COMBAT

» [N64] Although the bow is Link's traditional ranged weapon, sometimes a slingshot will suffice.

» [SNES] Getting the Master Sword is always a key moment in the *Zelda* games.

One thing Link certainly isn't short of is adversaries – almost everywhere he goes, he's under constant threat from all manner of monsters. The tools of the hero trade are weapons with which to beat back the baddies, and in any *Zelda* game you'll need to equip yourself appropriately before you can even think about defeating Ganon or rescuing Zelda. Fortunately, Nintendo has carefully crafted a range of weapons which ensure that combat is always a satisfying part of any *Zelda* game.

The Legend Of Zelda is relatively unusual among games of its era, in that Link is wholly unarmed when his adventure begins. This might seem an odd choice as the first thing he does in the game is to find a sword, but that overlooks the symbolic value of the action – Link is an ordinary boy who becomes a hero, and taking up the sword is the action that officially sets him on that journey. That's a theme repeated throughout the series, and each incarnation of Link's growth as a hero is represented by the later acquisition of the iconic Master Sword. Being the core part of Link's combat capability, swordplay tends to get the most attention with plenty of moves at his disposal across the series.

There's a lot more to Link's arsenal than simple swordplay though. From the beginning of the series, players have had access to bombs, boomerangs, a bow and arrow, and more, giving you additional combat options like explosive damage and ranged attacks. Shields, though less versatile, are also important within Link's combat repertoire. Link's defensive items don't just enrich combat by giving players more options, they help to shape our image of Link. Without the need to take cover the protagonist would feel like a powerful, all-conquering force of nature, rather than the resilient and resourceful hero who battles against the odds.

In fact, Link is really defined by his equipment. As a silent protagonist he has precious few personality traits to carry from game to game, so having a consistent look, set of abilities and equipment is crucial to establish continuity. That even works outside of the *Zelda* series – just look at Link's appearance in *Soulcalibur II*, in which he is differentiated from a cast full of sword fighters by the use of his most iconic alternative weapons.

But what's particularly interesting is that most of Link's equipment has more than one use. Take the Hookshot, which at first glance appears to be solely a utility item for traversing difficult terrain, but doubles as a useful combat tool due to its ability to stun enemies. In *The Wind Waker*, it plays a key role in the first boss fight against Gohma, first being used to pull rocks onto its head before allowing you to drag the enemy into striking range. Having multipurpose items is one of the great strengths of the *Zelda* series – it keeps the inventory lean and encourages players to experiment with Link's equipment in a variety of different situations. Long may it continue.

» [NES] Link's first time with a sword is an iconic scene in gaming history.

» [Switch] You can cause an enormous amount of havoc with bombs in *Breath Of The Wild*.

» [GameCube] Although adequately armed, Link can grab the weapons of fallen enemies in *The Wind Waker.*

TAKE THESE

FIVE ITEMS THAT USUALLY PROVE KEY TO LINK'S SUCCESS

MASTER SWORD

■ A legendary blade that must be found as part of Link's journey, as it alone holds the power to seal away evil and defeat Ganon. It usually has a blue hilt, and is found at a special pedestal.

BOOMERANG

■ Rather than causing damage, the boomerang is usually used to stun enemies ahead of sword attacks. They're very useful in dungeons, as they can retrieve distant items and hit otherwise inaccessible switches.

BOMB

■ As you'd expect, bombs can be thrown or placed and will detonate after a short period of time, causing explosive damage. They're often required to break rocks and other obstacles that Link faces.

BOW

■ If you want to attack baddies from a distance, the bow is the ideal way to do it. Although limited in supply, Link's arrows can be infused with various magical properties to better deal with specific enemies.

HOOKSHOT

■ Although it's more suited to movement, this grappling hook can stun enemies and sometimes bring them closer to Link, enabling him to deliver a follow-up attack more swiftly than running over by himself.

Q&A

MELOS HAN-TANI

THE CREATOR OF ANODYNE DISCUSSES LINK'S WEAPONRY

Why do you think the sword makes a good basic weapon for the *Zelda* series?

Being made in the Eighties, the sword was a popular choice amongst other high fantasy-inspired action RPGs such as *Zelda*'s predecessors, *The Tower Of Druaga* and *Hydlide*. I would have perhaps chosen a broom, but a sword is a classic symbol of 'Human Vs Environment,' and it's obvious and intuitive what it's for.

Many of the weapons in the *Zelda* games serve a dual purpose, also acting as ways to interact with puzzles. What's the importance of doing this?

Like interactive fiction and text adventures of the Seventies and Eighties, items serve as a way to convey different ways of interacting with a game world, even if they are essentially locks and keys. For example, 1984's *Hydlide* has a Magic Pot, which reveals the entrance of a cave for some reason. It's my theory that *Zelda* (and other action RPGs of the time) were trying to move this 'puzzle logic' of interactive fiction/text games into a more action-y form. The dual combat purpose generally serves as additional entertainment and to reduce the sense of an item just being a 'key' to a 'lock'.

Shields are also a key part of Link's combat equipment – why do you think there's such an emphasis on them?

Likely the high-fantasy roots of Japanese action RPGs. Most games featured a shield – such as *Hydlide*, whose shield is mostly useless, only raising your DEF by a hilariously few points. In borrowing the trope, Link 'standing behind a shield' conveys a sense he's an adventurer of those tales. From a game-design standpoint, I find shields a little boring as they're often equivalent to standing and waiting, but they do offer a simple way for someone to play it safe. I think the combat in the 3D *Zelda* games could be more interesting if the shield wasn't part of the equation.

Do you have a particular favourite among Link's weapons?

For some reason I always thought the level two boomerang in *Oracle Of Seasons* was really cool. Or the Magnetic Gloves. Or the directional Seed Shooter? The *Oracle* games had a lot of strange weapons.

» [PC] Anodyne draws clear inspiration from *Link's Awakening*, the first handheld *Zelda* adventure.

» [PC] Weaponry is a notable point of differentiation between *Anodyne* and the *Zelda* series.

BEASTLY BOSSES

SAVING THE WORLD ISN'T AN EASY TASK, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE FIGHTING AN ENEMY 20 TIMES YOUR SIZE. BOSS BATTLES PUNCTUATE THE ACTION IN ZELDA GAMES, PROVIDING TESTS OF SKILL AND DRAMATIC MOMENTS THAT SERVE TO ADVANCE THE PLOT

Link is a hero, that's his destiny – and any hero needs to overcome villains. Of course, he encounters hostility throughout his adventures, but beating up a bunch of cannon fodder baddies like Bokoblins and ChuChus doesn't strike anyone as being especially heroic. To prove himself as the legendary hero he's supposed to be, Link needs to take on rather more dangerous foes, from unassuming regular-sized wizards to giant dragons and skeletal monstrosities.

As you can probably guess from the descriptions above, one of the primary purposes that *Zelda* bosses serve is to provide a sense of spectacle – from the very first game the bosses have been larger than Link, and in some games they positively tower over him. The encounters also frequently take place in spectacular areas, atmospheric chambers which show off some of the most amazing sights to be seen in each game. It's obvious that boss battles are a chance for the artists to stretch the graphical capabilities of Nintendo's consoles, but they're designed to give the feeling that Link is outmatched. Watching Link take down an enormous enemy emphasises his skills and ingenuity – and by extension, yours.

You'll need to employ a little ingenuity too, as bosses also serve as a way to force you to change your tactics and explore other combat possibilities. Even if you can get within striking range of a boss, you're rarely likely to get anywhere by simply walking up to your foe and hacking away. The chances are that even if you are required to use the sword, you'll have to do something with one of Link's many other weapons and abilities beforehand in order to expose a weak point. In that way, the bosses introduce a puzzle element as the route to victory is sometimes not obvious at first glance.

Most of Link's epic boss encounters serve as the final challenges within dungeons, with the combination of combat and puzzle elements designed as a way to test your mastery of everything that you've encountered. Most often, any new equipment or skills that you acquire during the course of exploring a dungeon will play a key part in the boss fight, and you'll need to repeat your attack on the boss a few times, in the process proving your proficiency with your new abilities under pressure before you can tackle the next set of even more difficult challenges.

Coming at such key junctures in the game, boss encounters also tend to coincide with key plot points, often involving Link gathering crucial items for his quest or clearing a path to a previously inaccessible area. They help to pace the action as a result, serving as the culmination of a period of intense combat and puzzle solving and giving way to further exposition and soon enough, a return to the more gentle exploration that precedes the next dungeon. While some lament bosses as a difficult sticking point, they're still a key element of the rhythm of the *Zelda* experience. ▶

HELMASAUR KING

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

■ This huge boss is initially totally impervious to sword attacks thanks to facial armour, leaving it free to roam the room and swipe at Link with its tail. You'll need to use bombs or risky approaches with the Magic Hammer to destroy the protective mask and expose its weak point.

TENTALUS

The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword

■ This unique battle is as much a daring escape as it is a fight to the death. Tentalus thrusts its tentacles through the Sandship, destroying the decks and forcing Link to find higher ground. That big single eye is the weak point, which you'll need to shoot to open it up for further attacks.

GREATEST GUARDIANS

SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MAJOR MONSTERS LINK HAS FOUGHT

PUPPET GANON

The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker

■ Appearing late in the game, this boss is a memorable encounter because cutting its strings is only the start of the battle. Once you've shot the orb on its tail with Light Arrows, it'll take a spider form, and after that it will adopt the erratic movements of the classic Moldorm enemy.

TWINROVA

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

■ Koume and Kotake wield fire and ice magic, so using the Mirror Shield to redirect one sister's attacks at the other seems obvious. When they combine into Twinrova you'll need to repeatedly absorb attacks of one kind, charging up an elemental spell to create an opening by stunning them.

CRAYK

The Legend Of Zelda: The Phantom Hourglass

■ This fight is an unusual one as the camera changes to a first-person view from Crayk's perspective. You need to hit it in the face with an arrow to stun it, then get in and crack that shell to leave it vulnerable. Once exposed, attacking its face causes it to cover up and reveal its weak spot.

ARGOROK

The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

■ A flying foe is always going to be a problem for Link, but by latching onto its tail and equipping the Iron Boots, you can bring it crashing down to the ground. You'll need to head to the sky to take it out for good though, climbing on the fire-breathing beast's back to deliver the fatal blow.

GANON

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

■ The ultimate enemy requires the ultimate team, and the final encounter of one of the greatest *Zelda* games sees the titular princess joining forces with Link. With the hero having weakened the tyrant, Zelda provides a crucial intervention leading to the end of the fight and total victory.

MAGICAL MELODIES

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA DOESN'T JUST CONTAIN SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MUSIC IN VIDEOGAMES, AS WANDERSONG AND CHICORY DEVELOPER GREG LOBANOV DISCUSSES HOW MUSIC HAS PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE GAMEPLAY AND NARRATIVE IN BELOVED ENTRIES IN THE SERIES

Videogame music doesn't get more iconic than the melodies of *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*, both first composed by Nintendo's Koji Kondo for the NES. But *Zelda* arguably has a greater sweeping grandeur that makes its themes all the more special.

"*Zelda* is very much like a mythological story, so everything in it has this sense of being just super old, and so it always makes sense when it shows up in lots of places and it's amazing how well it fits," says *Wandersong* and *Chicory* developer Greg Lobanov. That unique history, with games spanning over three decades where many iconic themes are referred to time and time again and sometimes reinvented is also why he believes its music continues to shine above other games. "Even if a game has a soundtrack that's just as catchy, and just as well orchestrated, it'll never feel the same because *Zelda* has the advantage of that history and the way people experienced it in their childhood." Greg's first experience of the *Zelda* series in his childhood was *Ocarina Of Time*, which even inspired him to take up playing the ocarina. Arguably, music has had a special function in the series prior to this too, such as a fast-travel whistle in the very first game or the quest to collect instruments to play the Wind Fish Song in *Link's Awakening*. However, it was *Ocarina* that brought music perfectly together with both story and gameplay, as you played songs on the titular instrument, sometimes to unlock dungeons, sometimes to change the weather, or time of day, or even someone's mood. It's also a mechanic that was repeated in subsequent games, though Lobanov notes not as successfully.

"The Ocarina had that multipurpose where you could also just play it for fun," Greg adds. "The other ones felt a lot more like a weird minigame tied to rhythm that you do for certain scenes. They were not fun to play by themselves and the controls were a lot jankier and less expressive."

Being creatively expressive does however have its own issues when it comes to puzzle mechanics, as Greg recalls how you can make your own scarecrow song in *Ocarina*. "It was a fun idea that didn't totally work, personally because you had to memorise it," he explains. "So I made a cool song but I forgot it and then I couldn't get the scarecrow to show up, so I went back and made my song just up on the c-stick! You can't really have fun with this because you have to actually do something that has a practical use."

When we leave mechanics aside, music in *Zelda* is its own kind of fast-travelling power that instantly takes fans back to a certain place and time, reinforced by popular recurring themes. "The music always has a really clear sense of mood and space," says Greg. "The way that songs and themes show up in different places has its own way of telling you a story. It works because the melodies, even on your first playthrough, are really memorable." ✱

» [N64] Opening a chest in *Ocarina Of Time* is accompanied by an exciting-sounding tune that is still used in the series today.

» [Wii U] *Zelda*'s music always comes alive when exploring the overworld and it's particularly fitting in *The Wind Waker*.

Q&A
GREG LOBANOV
HOW ZELDA HAS INSPIRED GREG'S GAMES

What was the inspiration behind your music-themed game *Wandersong*?
The premise was basically like, *Ocarina Of Time* is really cool, but you always have to go into a mode to play it, so what if the game was the ocarina? What happens then? That was totally the starting point [laughs]. You use the right stick to bring up a musical wheel, and then you point in different directions to sing notes, or slide it along to play lots of notes. But you're also a side-scrolling character, so you can run, jump and sing all at the same time! The idea of playing magical songs is really cool, so I thought for a long time that it'd be super cool to see that in more games, which I've also seen recently with *Tchia*.

***Chicory* has a top-down *Zelda*-like adventure structure, so did the score by Lena Raine also take similar inspiration?**
I think there was some inspiration there but it wasn't our main focus because we made decisions that felt right for the game. In some cases, we're trying hard not to look too much like we're just copying *Zelda*. There's a lot of natural overlap in those games because *Chicory* is also a game that's about history, and Lena was really interested in working with instruments and instrumental writing that felt like it was calling back to historical things or had this sort of mythology on a pedestal. There's also a classic temple with secret messages, so we definitely were thinking about it but then we also kind of put our own spin on it too, so I wouldn't say it feels like a *Zelda* soundtrack – it has its own character to it in a lot of ways.

Which *Zelda* game resonates with you the most?
The Wind Waker really hit me because I was almost exactly Link's age, and I also had a little sister who was just born at the time – it just felt like it was made for me! Both Outset Island and Dragon Roost Island themes are really iconic for me as well. They both evoke a really specific place and mood that feel real to me. I feel like that's what *Zelda* does the strongest – just hearing that melody in any context, and I think of those places right away.

ZELDA'S GREATEST SOUNDTRACKS
MUSIC TO TRANSPORT YOU BACK TO HYRULE

A LINK TO THE PAST

With the SNES' audio sampling capabilities, Hyrule came alive with a new grandeur, felt in the title screen's fanfare to the iconic *The Legend Of Zelda* theme in the overworld. This is also where recurring themes like *Zelda's Lullaby*, *Fairy Fountain* and *Kakariko Village* were introduced.

OCARINA OF TIME

From the dreamy title theme to the sweeping score of *Hyrule Field*, *Ocarina Of Time*'s score is truly timeless, with some of the catchiest melodies made from just a few notes of the ocarina. It's also where the treasure-chest-opening music originated.

THE WIND WAKER

Perhaps the only time that a *Zelda* title theme happens to also be instrumental to the story. That aside, *The Wind Waker* is full of memorable themes from the *Great Sea* to *Dragon Roost Island*, but it's the homely *Outset Island* and *Aryll's Theme* that resonate the most.

SKYWARD SWORD

While a divisive *Zelda* game, everyone can agree that the soundtrack is sublime. It's the first in the series to be scored by a symphony orchestra. *Ballad Of The Goddess* is as iconic as the original theme, and regardless of how you feel about Fi, you can't help but be moved by her farewell.

BREATH OF THE WILD

As radical a departure as the game itself, opting for a largely ambient piano score, albeit with surprise renditions of familiar themes. There's still a sense of the epic, such as when you activate the Sheikah Towers, while the new *Kakariko Village* theme is outstanding.

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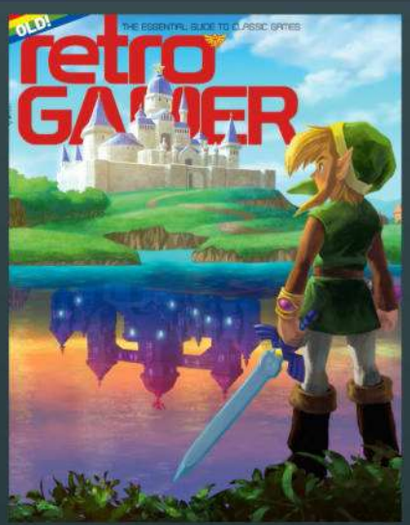		
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CLASSIC MOMENTS

Rampage

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1986 » **DEVELOPER:** BALLY MIDWAY

You were with your friends looking for a new arcade game to play. With the satisfying sound of coins clinking away in your pockets, the three of you eyed Bally Midway's *Rampage* nestling in a particularly smoky corner of your local haunt.

You had always enjoyed watching classic monster movies, from *Godzilla* films to *King Kong*, so the thought of taking control of a giant beast and terrifying the inhabitants of big American cities was too good an opportunity to miss. Decision made, you all fed your coins into the new machine and began to play.

Rampage didn't disappoint, and as you recreated the destruction you had enjoyed watching in films as a kid an idea suddenly formed. You began climbing towards the top of a building and started swatting at helicopters, gleefully laughing as you did. Sure, you weren't atop the Empire State Building and there were no biplanes in sight, but in your mind Midway's game was letting you recreate a classic scene that you loved, and that would stay with you for some time.

BIO

Rampage debuted in arcades in 1986. Designed by Brian Colin and Jeff Nauman, it proved popular with gamers who clearly loved smashing up famous cities as giant monsters. Sure, it doesn't have the most interesting mechanics, but that didn't stop gamers from enjoying it and numerous conversions for home systems quickly followed, including an Atari Lynx adaptation that added a new monster called Larry. While there's not been a new game since 2006, a hit movie starring Dwayne Johnson appeared in 2018.

MORE CLASSIC RAMPAGE MOMENTS

Just Dropping By

Run out of energy in *Rampage* and you respawn in the most entertaining of ways. As the city crumbles below you, your giant monster enters the playing area on a large blimp, before gracefully dropping down so it can continue its devastation on the city.

That's Electrifying!

As you smash up buildings and generally lay waste to anything you see you'll come across numerous things. Some like humans become tasty treats that will raise your health, but others will do the opposite. Hit a buzzing street sign or a toaster for example and you'll receive a shocking surprise. Ouch!

Human Again

Rampage's flimsy story casts you as mutated humans who go on a monstrous rampage in their new forms. The fun doesn't last forever though. Take enough damage and you'll revert to your naked human form, causing you to shuffle off the screen in embarrassment.

The Lady In Red

There are many ways to boost your points in *Rampage* and one of the best is to grab the woman wearing a red dress and hold on to her. Carry her around for too long and she'll comically attack you, which causes you to drop her. Eat her up before she can escape.

A TRIBUTE TO

SOFTWARE

FEW SOFTWARE HOUSES OF THE EIGHTIES INSPIRE AS MUCH NOSTALGIA AS OCEAN SOFTWARE. FROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS PUBLISHING ARCADE CLONES, IT GREW INTO THE UK'S LARGEST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT GAMES COMPANY THROUGHOUT THE DECADE AND BEYOND. RETRO GAMER CHARTS THE UPS AND DOWNS OF OCEAN IN THIS SPECIAL TRIBUTE

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

Having first encountered videogames while running a nightclub in the US, Ocean cofounder David Ward returned to the UK in 1981, immediately noticing the green shoots of the industry across the country. But the lack of a real bricks-and-mortar retail market discouraged David and his friend, Jon Woods, from venturing into the business of computer games. Then came the startling rise of Imagine Software and all the talk of flash cars and mega games that accompanied it. The pair took a punt and advertised four (then non-existent) games within the pages of *Your Computer* magazine. Inundated with postal orders, they suddenly realised that they needed games – and fast.

Under the banner of Spectrum Games, David and Jon focussed on creating homages (or clones) of arcade favourites such as *Frogger* and *Missile Command*, but as they were also selling games for other computers such as the VIC-20, the name was problematic. In the 2013 book *Ocean: The History*, Paul Finnegan, who had joined from Imagine, cites a van passing their office window emblazoned with 'Ocean Transport' as the source of the name. Whatever its origin, Ocean Software, or just Ocean, was up and running, advertising for games and programmers and publishing its first products under a bright new logo.

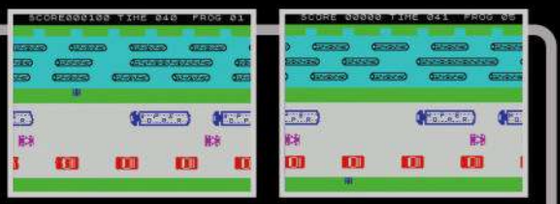
For a short while, the arcade clones (*Kong Strikes Back!* and *RollerBall*) and original games (*Cavelon* and *Chinese Juggler*) continued, but it wasn't long before Ocean was dipping its toes into the world of licensing, and one game proved to be the stellar success that would put the company on the path to success. Released in 1984, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* was a massive hit, destroying a million joysticks and keyboards in the process. Further licences followed, yet when Gary Bracey joined in 1986 as software manager, Ocean was floundering. A string of under-par games was beginning to harm the reputation David and Jon had steadily built up. Under the guidance of Gary, Ocean began to rely less on third-party developers, instead forming an in-house team of artists, programmers and musicians in the basement of its offices in Central Street, Manchester.

Gary Bracey oversaw this expansion of creatives, acting as a buffer between them and the management, and the arrangement stimulated a vast turnaround in Ocean's fortunes. By the late-Eighties, it had established itself as the UK's largest and most well-known software house – if any company could survive the transition from 8-bit to 16-bit, it would be Ocean.

GARY BRACEY
» Gary Bracey joined Ocean Software in 1986 as software manager and success quickly followed. He's currently at Virtua, a 'gamified metavese' which he cofounded.

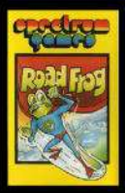
By the early Nineties, Ocean was expanding worldwide, mainly thanks to commercial hits such as *RoboCop* and *Batman*. Yet despite its reputation as a licence-based publisher, the original games continued, thanks chiefly to Gary's enthusiasm. From Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels* to Sensible Software's *Wizball* and the combat flight sims of Digital Image Design, there was always a commitment to producing new games, should they be diverse and of sufficient quality.

In 1996, Ocean merged with French giant Infogrames in a deal worth reportedly £100 million. It wasn't long before it rebranded from the famous name to Infogrames UK, a sad end to a legendary company that brought so many 8-bit gamers, in particular, joy throughout its life.



ROAD FROG

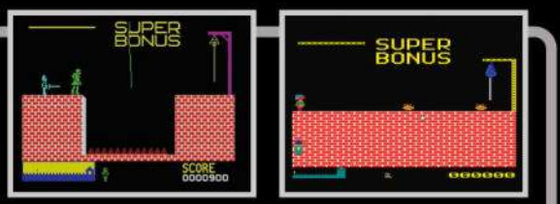
ZX SPECTRUM, 1983



Arcade clones were rife on the ZX Spectrum during its early days, and Ocean, under the guise of Spectrum Games, joined the fray with this unsubtle *Frogger* clone. Coded within just 16K, there's a distinct lack of polish – for example, the player's frog is a static image, lacking any animation whatsoever – but as simple arcade-style games go, it does the job despite some frustratingly sticky controls. In its short lifetime, Spectrum Games released many similar clones, notably *Caterpilla* (*Centipede*), *Monster Muncher* (*Pac-Man*) and *Rocket Command* (*Scramble*).

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was released while I had my computer-game shop in Liverpool, and I recall folks lapping it up and these arcade-alikes, as it enabled them to enjoy the coin-op experience at home."



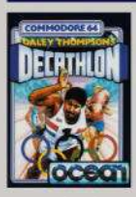
HUNCHBACK

VARIOUS, 1984

One year later, Spectrum Games transformed into Ocean Software, and the company was on the cusp of the big time. For its first officially licensed arcade game, it chose the obscure Century Electronics coin-op machine, *Hunchback*. Loosely based on the Victor Hugo story, *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*, Quasimodo strides across the top of a castle wall, dodging arrows, soldiers and fireballs. It's an uncomplicated arcade game, which may have been why Ocean selected it for home conversions, with mixed results. The Commodore 64 game is probably the pick of the bunch, while the Spectrum game lacks a touch of finesse. Still, an excellent Bob Wakelin cover and the distinctive Ocean-style packaging helped *Hunchback* become a best-seller.

DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

VARIOUS, 1984



Otherwise known as the joystick and keyboard breaker, the idea of licensing Olympic personality Daley Thompson was inspired, transforming an otherwise plain *Track & Field* clone into a smash hit. There are ten events spread over two days: 100m, long jump, shot-put, high jump and 400m on day one, with 100m hurdles, discus, pole vault, javelin and 1,500m on day two. An incredible seller on the ZX Spectrum, Ocean owed much of its early impetus to this renowned joystick waggler. Two sequels, *Supertest* and *Olympic Challenge*, followed over the next four years.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"I think this was the game that elevated Ocean from just another computer-game company to a serious player. Whenever I mention Ocean to anyone from that time, their first response is almost always, 'I remember *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*!'"

DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON TRIVIA FILE

Five facts about the famous button-masher

HE'S HEARD IT BEFORE

In a 2012 interview, Daley Thompson revealed that fans had told him "tens of thousands of times" that he owes them money for a new keyboard.

COLOUR CLASH

The Spectrum version of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* drew controversy for portraying its star as white, probably due to the limitations of the computer's palette.

GOLD MEDALS

The Ocean game won a series of awards, most notably Best Arcade Game in the *Crash* readers' awards and the 1984 *CVG* Golden Joystick award for Best Arcade-Style Game.

DALEY FOREVER

Sequels aside, *Decathlon* proved a perennial for Ocean, re-released in a clam-shell case, appearing on compilations (*They Sold A Million*) and on its budget range, The Hit Squad.

CHEATS PROSPER

There's a helpful bug in the original Spectrum game whereby Daley can nip under the high jump, yet the game still registers a clearance.

MATCH DAY

VARIOUS, 1984

■ Jon Ritman's first game for Ocean proved a big hit with ZX Spectrum owners and became the football fan's game of choice on the computer for many years. Having been lured by Ocean's promotional prowess, Jon created a startlingly playable and then-complex football simulation. Players can cross, shoot, pass and head the ball (kind of), and there's a range of league and cup options for those looking for more than a one-off friendly. A chance meeting with David Ward at an Alexandra Palace computer show led to a hefty advance for Jon, which he used to craft *Match Day*'s primitive yet effective AI. The game narrowly missed out on a *Crash* Smash, and while it fared poorly on other formats, it's a genuine Spectrum legend.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"Along with *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, these were the first Ocean games that earned a sequel due to their huge success."

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

VARIOUS, 1985

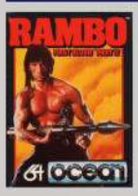
■ The successful Liverpool band was an odd choice for a videogame licence, but it proved an inspired choice once in the hands of developer Denton Designs. The game takes the band's themes, the player completing tasks and minigames to gain percentage in the attributes of Pleasure, War, Love and Faith, ultimately entering The Pleasuredome and becoming a 'real' person. These vary from the mundane to complex, and there's plenty of Eighties social and political comment, most notably in the minigames Raid Over Merseyside and Talking Heads. A bizarre game, and the first 'big box' game from Ocean, its second tape containing a live recording of *Relax*.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was very much a Marmite game. Many people loved it, but most just didn't get it. A typical brain-mangler from the very talented Denton Designs."

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

VARIOUS, 1986



■ By the end of the Eighties, Ocean had become renowned for its movie-based licences, and it all began here with that most quintessential of action heroes, Rambo. Inspired by the success of arcade conversion *Commando*, *Rambo* is an open-world run-and-gunner with considerably more depth than the Elite game. In a plot that mirrors the cinematic sequel, Rambo lands in hostile enemy territory, and his mission is to rescue several hostages from a nearby POW camp. Littered around the map are his weapons, including a rocket launcher, machine gun and bow and arrow. Once Rambo locates the POW camp, he can use his knife to free the prisoners before stealing a chopper and escaping. *Rambo* replicates the (admittedly uncomplicated) movie perfectly and was a decent first stab at movie licensing for Ocean, especially on the Commodore 64.

HOW TO BE A HERO

Use these essential tips to help Rambo rescue his buddies

GRAB THE GUN

■ Go north from Rambo's insertion point, and you'll eventually come to a small hut braced by a pair of statues. Resting against a wall is his powerful machine gun.

INTO THE POW CAMP

■ Continue north until Rambo reaches the southeast corner of the camp. Follow the river to the right, and eventually, a gap appears. Blast the fence with your explosive arrows.

SAVE BANKS

■ Make your way west through the camp. When you get to the far fence, turn north and nestled between three huts is Banks. Use the knife to cut him loose.

RESCUE THE POWS

■ Next, guide Rambo north until you come to a helicopter. Jump in and head back to the camp's helipad. The POWs are imprisoned in the southwest corner.

KNIGHT RIDER

VARIOUS, 1986

Debuting in February of 1983 in the UK, *Knight Rider* quickly became a TV hit, and once Ocean had begun to hit its licensing stride, it was the obvious choice, especially once *Airwolf* had slipped through its grasp. Farmed out to a third-party developer, the central idea behind *Knight Rider* is sound: using a map screen of the US, the player selects a mission and steps into the futuristic KITT before infiltrating an enemy base. Sadly, *Knight Rider*'s implementation leaves much to be desired: it's far too easy and simplistic, with visuals that fail to evoke the TV series.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This is the game that changed everything. Those days, Ocean had a skeleton team of devs in-house and farmed out most of its licences to freelance developers. This particular lot were based in Brighton, and when I visited, they were just smoking and drinking their advance payment until it was time to deliver the game – which never materialised. I realised we needed more oversight and had to recruit a larger in-house team. And so, the new Ocean development era began."

THE GREAT ESCAPE

VARIOUS, 1986

Cheekily based on the actual wartime event rather than the famous movie, *The Great Escape* is, to many 8-bit fans, Ocean and Denton Designs' finest hour. Set within a dark and oppressive POW camp during World War II, the player is a captured prisoner with one thing on their mind: escape. Freedom can be achieved through various methods, from clipping the fence wire to stealing a guard uniform, but beware: should you get caught, it's a morale-sapping trip to solitary for this brave soldier. Presented in a stark isometric view, *The Great Escape* is a thrilling and tense experience with the player furtively planning their getaway while following the daily roll call, exercise and meal times schedule. While he was reportedly not a fan, many cite Bob Wakelin's stark cover as his most outstanding work.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"I loved this game, although I did voice a concern about the title as we didn't actually have the licence! However, the cover art by Bob Wakelin was one of his finest and probably helped move the game off the shelves more than the actual title."

STREET HAWK

VARIOUS, 1986

Riding in on the coattails of *Knight Rider* came *Street Hawk* in 1985, effectively replacing a high-tech car with a high-tech motorbike. While short-lived (it only lasted one season), the series was popular enough to persuade Ocean to acquire the licence for a computer game – and that's where the trouble started. Ocean had committed *Street Hawk* to the Kays catalogue and *Crash* magazine as a subscriber perk (the subs offer was first mentioned in issue 18), and when development stalled, it rushed out a *Defender*-style platform game to satisfy these demands. According to an interview with Gary in *Ocean: The History*, the first *Street Hawk* never went on general release. Ocean then released an official version programmed by in-house coder Paul Owens in late-1986. While this newer version was graphically pleasing, especially on the ZX Spectrum, it was met with indifference, and a proposed C64 version was canned.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was around the same time as *Knight Rider*, and we were having similar problems. Once we discovered what a mess it was, we pulled an emergency plan together, and Paul Owens – one of our key in-house coders – wrote the game over a matter of weeks."

COBRA

VARIOUS, 1986

Eighties action movies reached their nadir in 1986 with the bland and nonsensical Sylvester Stallone vehicle, *Cobra*. But for Spectrum fans in particular, the movie will always be remembered as the basis for coder Jonathan Smith's best moment in a prestigious career. Set across three scenes from the film (streets, countryside andfactory), the programmer's trademark sense of humour is present throughout (see Joffa's Japes), and it plays wonderfully, too. Unfortunately, the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64 games, while closer in spirit to the Stallone film, were substantially inferior.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"Joffa did an amazing job with this game, and I think he turned it around in quite a short time frame. We acquired this licence pretty late on, so it needed to be released ASAP to capitalise on the movie's popularity. Joffa came to the rescue."

JOFFA'S JAPES

How Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith infused Cobra with bizarre humour

BURGER ME

A plastic burger features in one painful scene in the movie. Joffa hid all of Cobra's weapons inside the fast food for reasons best known to himself.

ABOVE THE LAW

Unimpressed by the wanton carnage and total lack of proper police procedure, Joffa replaced the fire key with the more accurate 'murder'.

USE YOUR HEAD

When unarmed, Cobra dispenses a brutal headbutt on his enemies. "Use your head," advises the game, with a snake and two hands displayed bottom right.

A RUNNING DUCK

Cobra is based on the novel *Fair Game* by Paula Gosling. Joffa got his 'duckometer' idea from its alternative title, *A Running Duck*.

THE MORGUE

Women with rocket launchers and knife-wielding thugs we understand – but prams? And finally, the high score table is now called 'The Morgue'. How appropriate.

DONKEY KONG

VARIOUS, 1986

Ocean has a long history with Nintendo's rock-hard platform game. Back in its arcade clone phase, there was the unsubtle homage *Kong*, coded by Paul Owens and released to a generally positive reception. A year later, Jonathan Smith and Nigel Alderton combined to create a sequel, *Kong Strikes Back*, that manages to cheekily ape both *Donkey Kong* and *Mr Do's Wild Ride*. Strangely, in 1986, Ocean decided it was time to put out an official version of the Nintendo classic, handing development duties to Sentient Software (Spectrum and MSX) and Arcana Software (Amstrad CPC and C64). Both teams did a competent job, especially on the Amstrad CPC, but the appearance of this conversion from a six-year-old arcade machine didn't exactly excite the press at the time. As many reviewers noted, why would you shell out nine pounds for the official conversion when we'd played so many cheaper clones over the years?

HEAD OVER HEELS

VARIOUS, 1987

Having honed their isometric skills with Ocean's *Batman*, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond created what many consider their best work in 1987 with this tale of two cute creatures on a mission to defeat an evil empire. *Head Over Heels*' unique method of solving puzzles – sometimes separately, other times as a pair – and well-designed levels hugely endeared it to reviewers and fans. Every version is pure gaming gold.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"Jon was a great guy to work with, incredibly creative, and he wouldn't hand over the final game until he was 100% happy with it. We had a friendly disagreement with him over the title – he wanted to call it *Foot And Mouth*; I felt that had too many negative connotations. But the game was fantastic and one of the few I played in my own time."

WIZBALL

VARIOUS, 1987

Essex-based Sensible Software had already released shoot-'em-up *Parallax* with Ocean before 1987 brought this weird yet brilliant follow-up. *Wizball* is the story of Wiz and his magical cat, living happily in the vivid Wizworld until an evil wizard appears, draining every drop of colour from the landscape. Aghast at this drab world, Wiz sets out to collect the droplets of colour and restore Wizworld to its former glory. This unique, fun and slightly trippy shoot-'em-up is rightly regarded as a classic on the Commodore 64, and Ocean's 16-bit catalogue was also up and running.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"I loved *Wizball* and enjoyed working with Jon and Chris at Sensible. However, it was a tough job to get the company to buy into this game as it was so quirky and different – and a nightmare to market as it didn't have a recognisable gameplay hook or title. But the originality is what I was so excited about, and it sold fairly well due to the positive reviews – but not nearly as well as it deserved."

THE WORLD OF WIZBALL

Enjoy These Wonderful Wizball Facts

ARCADE INSPIRATION

Despite its weirdness, *Wizball* was inspired by arcade shoot-'em-ups such as *Nemesis* and *Salamander*, with an extra layer of Sensible creativity and surrealness.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Sensible designed a caves section, with Wiz searching on foot for more colour droplets. It was abandoned due to memory restrictions and appeared in the sequel, *Wizkid*.

NIFTY NIFTA

Wiz's feline friend is based on a real animal, Chris Yates' pet cat Nifta, who was, "Always around when we were making games," recalled Jon Hare in issue 31 of **Retro Gamer**.

MUSIC MAESTRO

Sensible's agreement with Ocean eschewed music despite its developers being accomplished musicians. Enter Martin Galway to provide *Wizball*'s catchy themes.

OPERATION WOLF

VARIOUS, 1988

Until *Operation Wolf*, Ocean had predominantly used its Imagine sub-label to publish arcade conversions. Taito's immensely successful lightgun blaster was deemed important enough to appear under its own branding, as the Ocean in-house dev teams began pondering how to squeeze this fast-moving and colourful arcade game into the home computers. Nevertheless, it was the perfect licence: *Operation Wolf* is an Eighties action movie in videogame form. The player is Lone Wolf, charging into enemy territory to free captured comrades. Throughout the six enemy locations, Lone Wolf eradicates soldiers with his sub-machine gun while taking out tanks, helicopters and more with grenades. Brilliantly employing a solid lightgun that put the player firmly into the action, it's no wonder the arcade game was a hit and, despite the gulf in technology, Ocean did a decent job of the home ports. Colossal sales ensued.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was an incredibly difficult conversion for us as the game was huge graphically. It also featured side-scrolling, which was not a great function for the Spectrum especially. The guys did an amazing job, however, and it was a deserved hit."

PLATOON

VARIOUS, 1988

Oliver Stone's anti-war movie was an odd choice for a licence, but Ocean did the film justice, bringing in a multi-stage format that would serve its cinematic games for some time. *Platoon* follows the movie's plot closely, with the player's squad negotiating a booby-trapped jungle, tunnels and a bunker before taking on the deranged Sergeant Barnes. The big box package included an extra cassette with Smokey Robinson's *Tracks Of My Tears*.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"In hindsight, it seems a strange movie to make a game from, but I believe we treated the source material with appropriate reverence and respect. It was one of the first games we made with different gameplay sections, a method we used a lot in subsequent movie licences. It was also the first time we deployed a co-op marketing strategy with the movie company – they featured an ad for the game in the video, and we promoted the video in the game. I think we gained the better benefit!"

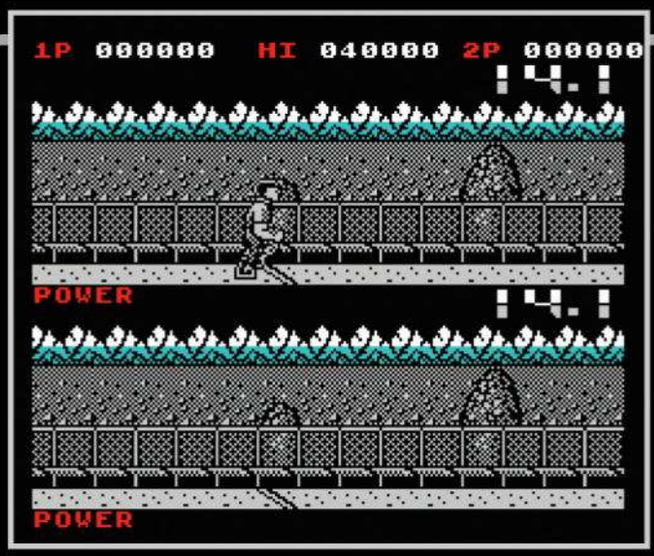
ROBOCOP

VARIOUS, 1988

When the movie *RoboCop* saw release late in 1987, audiences lapped up its dystopian themes, humour and extreme violence. Having acquired the movie rights at script stage, Ocean made bank with the official computer game, licensing it to coin-op company Data East, which it then used as a basis for its home versions. Over its multiple stages, the chrome cop stomps and shoots through various grizzled baddies before facing off against the dreaded ED-209. Following the film closely (including a brilliant photofit section), *RoboCop* became the smash hit that propelled Ocean into the big time.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This game helped Ocean expand internationally, becoming huge in Japan and the USA. And it was a bit of a punt as we signed it at script stage without a major director or star attached – the strength of the story won me over. It was very speculative – it could have turned out to be a real B-movie – thank goodness for Verhoeven!"



COMBAT SCHOOL

VARIOUS, 1988

Konami's arcade game was a timely and practical merging of two popular tropes: the Vietnam War and the multi-sports button-mashing videogames genre. Players competed over a series of either physical (obstacle course, arm wrestling and hand-to-hand combat) or military events (several shooting ranges), using the coin-op machine's trackball and button controls. It was a smash hit, proving Konami's faith in the combination, and Ocean acquired the licence for European conversions to the C64, Amstrad and ZX Spectrum. Despite the lack of a trackball, Ocean's dev teams put in an impressive shift, resulting in copious accolades and sales. While there were some concerns over the game's difficulty [It's war, it's supposed to be tough! – Ed], each event is translated well, the sheer variety of gameplay styles on show offering excellent bang for your buck. Talking of value for money, Ocean very kindly bundled a demo cassette of another upcoming arcade conversion, *Gryzor*.

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

VARIOUS, 1988

By 1988, Ocean was well on the way to becoming the UK's biggest and most-recognised software house. The licences, chiefly arcade and movie, were coming thick and fast, yet it still found time for the odd original gem. Having already produced the isometric World War II classic, *The Great Escape*, developer Denton Designs stunned ZX Spectrum fans with this thrilling tale that evokes the spirit of Kevin Connor's Seventies fantasy movies. *Where Time Stood Still* begins at a crash site, pieces of plane wreckage dotted around the landscape. There are four survivors: pilot Jarret, Gloria, Dirk and the constantly bellyaching Clive. The player can control each character, but they all react differently to certain situations, making *Where Time Stood Still* an arcade adventure of considerable depth. Although strangely only ported to the Atari ST and PC, its release marked a shift in Ocean's focus as it moved away from the 48K Spectrum and began a notable expansion towards the 16-bit computers.

BATMAN

VARIOUS, 1989

The success of its *Platoon* and *RoboCop* games was the springboard that Gary Bracey and Ocean needed to ramp up its movie licensing. And at the end of the Eighties, there was no bigger movie than *Batman*. Obscenely overhyped and anticipated, obtaining the licence for a home-computer game inevitably cost Ocean compared to *RoboCop* and *Platoon* – but it was worth it. The game closely follows the movie as Batman swings around its platform locations, charges down the streets in the Batmobile and takes to the skies in the Batwing. Each version plays smoothly and, together with Ocean's trademark excellent presentation, it amounted to another smash hit. Even the Spectrum version, coded by the *RoboCop* team of Mike Lamb and Dawn Drake, delivers a Batcave full of entertainment.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was our first blockbuster licence, so an awful lot was riding on it. Not only did we have to get the game right – which I believe we did – but we also had to comply with a lot of onerous licensing approvals. 'Batman's ears are a pixel too long,' was one particular comment…"

F29 RETALIATOR

VARIOUS, 1989

Despite being set in the near future, *F29 Retaliator* marked the start of an era of serious videogames for Ocean as the new decade approached. Developed for the 16-bit systems, its four scenarios each house several missions over locations such as the deserts of Arizona and a World War III-ravaged Europe. Focussing on combat, it was the first of many excellent games from Digital Image Design.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This was our first foray into serious simulations and heralded the start of Digital Image Design. Martin Kenwright presented me with a one-page handwritten design overview and a technical vector demo – we shook hands on the deal there and then!"

RAINBOW ISLANDS

VARIOUS, 1990

The origin of this arcade conversion is convoluted, and at the centre of the chaos was developer Graftgold. Telecomsoft (Firebird) chose Steve Turner's company to convert the colourful *Bubble Bobble* sequel to the eight and 16-bit computers, probably on the back of its successful work on *Flying Shark*. For whatever reason, the deal with Taito elapsed (or fell through) and the legal wranglings were further intensified when MicroProse acquired Telecomsoft in 1989. It took an outside source – Ocean – to solve the mess, stepping in to purchase both the rights to the game and the existing work done by Graftgold, eventually releasing the game in 1990. It was worth the wait, as each version of *Rainbow Islands* is a multicoloured marvel, a cute and charming platformer that's just as much fun as it was in the arcades. Special kudos goes to Andrew Braybrook's Amiga version. On a computer that hadn't always excelled at arcade conversions, the ace Graftgold coder produced a game that became the standard for platformers on the Amiga for many years to come.

OCEAN REMEMBERED

OCEAN: THE HISTORY

First published in 2013, Fusion Retro Books' in-depth tome, *Ocean: The History*, documents the rise and fall of the famous software house, from its arcade clone beginnings to the buyout by Infogrames. Co-written by the late Roger Kean, the book begins with an 80-page history before dozens of Ocean alums lend their memories of working at the Manchester company. Crammed full of fascinating insight into the inner workings of one of the most successful computer games developers and publishers in the Eighties and beyond, *Ocean: The History* remains an essential purchase for fans of Ocean and its games. You can buy it from the Fusion Retro Books website: fusionretrobooks.com

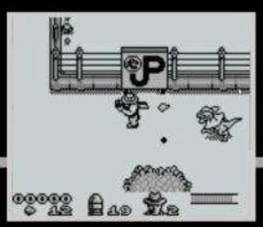
THE ADDAMS FAMILY

VARIOUS, 1992

By 1992, Ocean's previous core audience of Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad owners was dwindling fast; the sensible commercial decision was to expand into the burgeoning console market, specifically the Sega Mega Drive and Super Nintendo. In *The Addams Family*, the player takes control of Gomez Addams, desperately attempting to retrieve his family from the grasp of Abigail Craven and her cohorts. While criticised in some quarters for its lack of originality, *The Addams Family* is a smooth, charming and pleasant platform game that helped solidify Ocean's place in the 16-bit market.

GARY'S MEMORIES

"This one was, I believe, one of the best games Ocean ever published. The game was so incredibly playable as its design was close to perfection. I loved it, and although it wasn't the biggest movie licence Ocean acquired, it was one of my favourites and severely under appreciated."



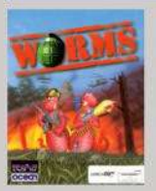
JURASSIC PARK

VARIOUS, 1993

Few movies came bigger than *Jurassic Park*, the hype machine going into overdrive in the summer of 1993 for the Michael Crichton adaptation. Ocean secured the rights to develop and publish Commodore Amiga, PC, Game Boy, SNES and, bizarrely, Nintendo Entertainment System games. Developed in conjunction with its office in California, Ocean tried to do something a bit different with *Jurassic Park*, perhaps as a reaction to the criticism of *The Addams Family*. The Game Boy and NES games are presented in an angled overhead view as Alan Grant explores Isla Nublar, dodging dinos and rescuing the other stranded guests. Meanwhile, over on the Amiga, SNES and PC, the extra power incorporates first-person sections and a game that closely follows the movie's plot.

WORMS

VARIOUS, 1995



By the mid-Nineties, Team17 had fostered an excellent range of videogames, chiefly for the Commodore Amiga market. But with that computer's popularity dwindling, it decided to branch out with its next game, requiring help from a third-party publisher. The game was *Worms*, a light-hearted artillery tactical title that brought an idiosyncratic sense of humour to the death and destruction. Devised by Andy Davidson, each player controls a squad of annelids, selecting weapons and tools to eliminate the enemy over a series of diverse scenarios. The simple playability of *Worms* endeared it to a large audience, with the game appearing on an assortment of formats, including the Mac, Game Boy and PlayStation, and the game would come to define its developer. Ocean also published *Worms: The Director's Cut* in 1997 before its relationship with Team17 ended.

THE WORMS TRIVIA FILE

Little snippets on the Team17/Ocean smash hit

TANKS FOR THE INSPIRATION

Andy Davidson's idea for *Worms* began in 1990, initially inspired by the many tank games of the Eighties, such as the Atari 2600's classic, *Combat*.

ONTO THE AMIGA

The gameplay of *Artillery* (as it was then known) morphed considerably in 1993 as Andy adopted the Amiga as his platform. The success of *Lemmings* influenced the design from there.

ENTER THE WORMS

Keen to avoid stereotypical soldiers and tanks, Andy hit upon the idea of using worms as his main characters. Their small size and ease of design helped the decision.

TOTAL WORMAGE TO WORMS

Artillery became *Total Wormage* before Andy showed the game to Team17 at the 1994 ECTS show. Team17 loved it and signed the game on the spot.

EF 2000

PC, 1995

In 1995, Ocean and Digital Image Design released what many regard as the pinnacle of Nineties combat flight simulations. In *EF 2000*, the player steps into the cockpit of an advanced Eurofighter Typhoon jet, defending the skies against various threats, most notably a Russian force attempting to gain control of Scandinavia as a precursor to an invasion of Northern Europe. Set slightly in the future – as its name suggests, the Eurofighter itself wouldn't be around for a few more years – Ocean's promotional campaign boasted of "proprietary polygon-mapping techniques" coupled with "real world flight dynamics, avionics and authentic missions". With up to eight-player multiplayer, detailed terrain, an extensive range of weapons and plenty of other options, the result was a relative hit for Ocean, given the niche target audience. A sequel to an earlier Ocean/DID collaboration, *TFX*, there was an expansion pack a year later, followed by an updated version, *Super EF 2000*. Meanwhile, DID shifted continents to the American Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor for its next game.

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

The finest games of Ocean and Digital Image Design

F-29 RETALIATOR

The game that thrust Ocean into the world of serious software. With its four campaigns and many missions, it also kick-started a decade of co-operation between Ocean and DID.

ROBOCOP 3

While the 8-bit computers got more of the same, Amiga, PC and Atari ST owners enjoyed a hugely ambitious first-person shooter that pushed the tech to its limits. Let's not mention that dongle…

EF 2000

Sleek, fast and exciting, *EF 2000* represents DID and Ocean's finest moment of the Nineties. Technically amazing, yet still fun to play, *EF 2000* enjoys a cult following today.

F-22: AIR DOMINANCE FIGHTER

After EF 2000, DID smoothed out its gameplay further as it moved to the American F-22 jet. Including more strategic control elements, it's a step up in complexity.

TUNNEL B1

VARIOUS, 1996

Tunnel B1's developer, Neon Software, initially approached Ocean with the idea of a complex helicopter/hovercraft hybrid game. The publisher split the concept into two, and while the helicopter section failed to see the light of day, this fast-paced hovercraft game was released in 1996 to an enthusiastic reception, especially regarding its outstanding visuals. As a tech demo for the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn, *Tunnel B1* is an excellent example of what the new 32-bit consoles were capable of, amply making up for what it lacked in gameplay depth.

GARY'S MEMORIES

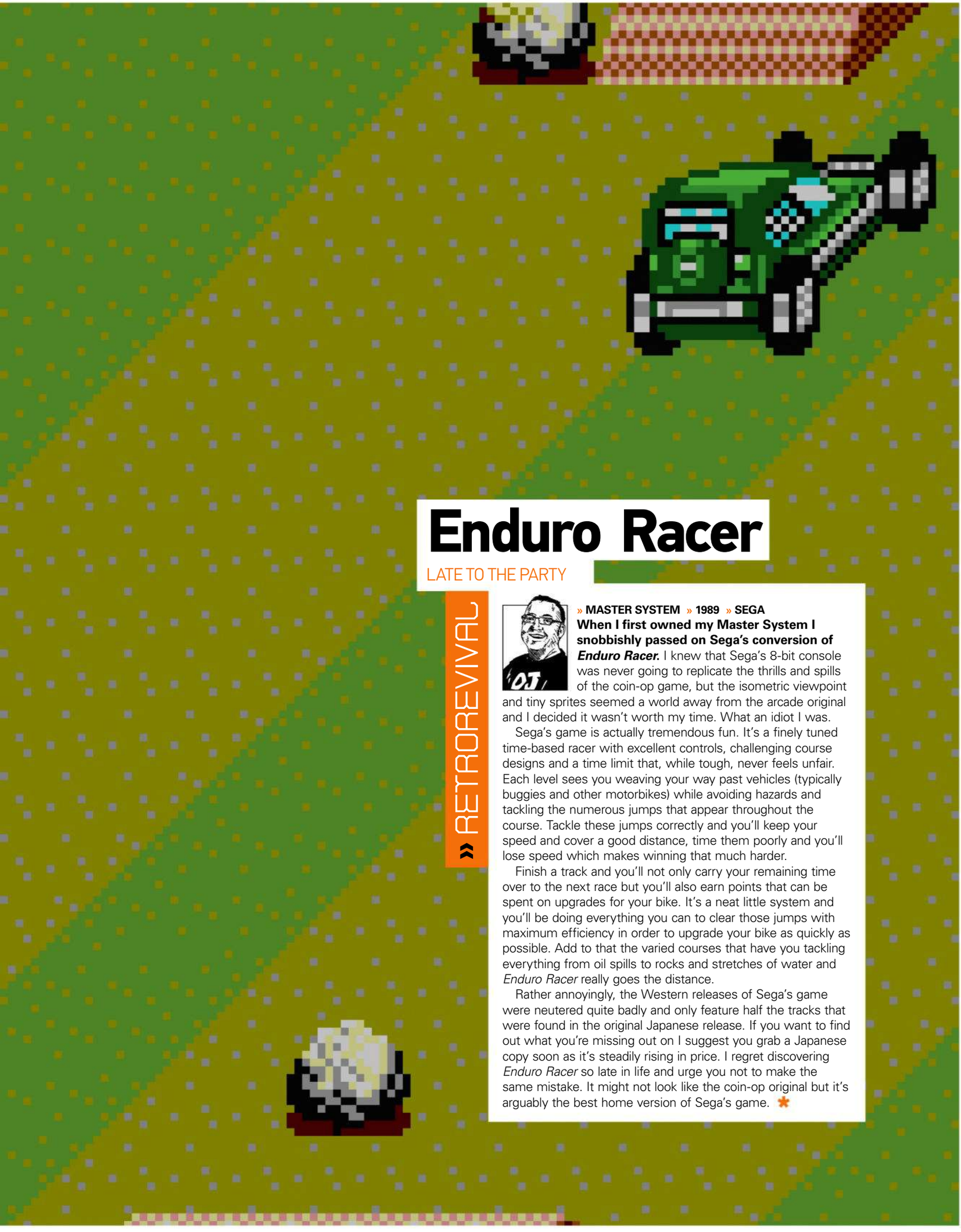
"I had left the company by this time, but the dawn of the PlayStation era had already begun. Not only did the 3D facility pose new and exciting development challenges, it also elevated the cost of developing a game from the low six-figure budgets for the computers to seven figures. As a result, the stakes were becoming higher and developing a mediocre game had much greater consequences."

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

NINTENDO 64, 1998

Despite its troubled development, this movie licence was an appropriate release for one of Ocean's final games. Originally planned and developed on PC, when it switched to an early Nintendo 64 release, difficulties over the new technology and what it could (or more pertinently, couldn't) achieve meant that *Mission: Impossible* didn't appear until 1998, two years after the release of the Tom Cruise film. Fortunately, talk of a sequel kept the franchise active, and when Infogrames bought Ocean in 1997, development shifted to a new team based in France. A 3D action adventure in the mould of Rare's *GoldenEye*, *Mission: Impossible* houses 20 third-person levels based around a range of exotic locations. The player is Ethan Hunt, utilising inventive gadgets and deadly weapons as he tackles various threats to world peace. Bearing little resemblance to the original movie's plot, *Mission: Impossible* nevertheless follows its spirit well, becoming a medium-sized hit for Ocean. A PlayStation port followed in 1999, but by then, Ocean was absorbed into the Infogrames empire as Infogrames UK.

TIME
31



Enduro Racer

LATE TO THE PARTY

» RETROREVIVAL

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1989 » SEGA

When I first owned my Master System I snobbishly passed on Sega's conversion of *Enduro Racer*. I knew that Sega's 8-bit console was never going to replicate the thrills and spills of the coin-op game, but the isometric viewpoint and tiny sprites seemed a world away from the arcade original and I decided it wasn't worth my time. What an idiot I was.

Sega's game is actually tremendous fun. It's a finely tuned time-based racer with excellent controls, challenging course designs and a time limit that, while tough, never feels unfair. Each level sees you weaving your way past vehicles (typically buggies and other motorbikes) while avoiding hazards and tackling the numerous jumps that appear throughout the course. Tackle these jumps correctly and you'll keep your speed and cover a good distance, time them poorly and you'll lose speed which makes winning that much harder.

Finish a track and you'll not only carry your remaining time over to the next race but you'll also earn points that can be spent on upgrades for your bike. It's a neat little system and you'll be doing everything you can to clear those jumps with maximum efficiency in order to upgrade your bike as quickly as possible. Add to that the varied courses that have you tackling everything from oil spills to rocks and stretches of water and *Enduro Racer* really goes the distance.

Rather annoyingly, the Western releases of Sega's game were neutered quite badly and only feature half the tracks that were found in the original Japanese release. If you want to find out what you're missing out on I suggest you grab a Japanese copy soon as it's steadily rising in price. I regret discovering *Enduro Racer* so late in life and urge you not to make the same mistake. It might not look like the coin-op original but it's arguably the best home version of Sega's game.

» [Arcade] After the gold rush. Later stages depict towns that have fallen into ruin.

» [Arcade] If you accidentally collect the creepy cow skull it removes one of your upgrades.

ULTIMATE GUIDE GUN.SMOKE

WHEN SETH MACFARLANE CALLED HIS MOVIE A MILLION WAYS TO DIE IN THE WEST HE COULD HAVE BEEN REFERRING TO GUN SMOKE, CAPCOM'S TOUGH-AS-NAILS COWBOY SHOOTER FROM 1985. JOIN US AS WE LOAD UP, SADDLE UP AND TRY TO STAY UP FOR MORE THAN FIVE SECONDS

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» US Gold published the 8-bit home-computer versions on its GO! label.

"GUN SMOKE IS NO LAZY COMMANDO RESKIN, AS IT FEATURES ENOUGH DIFFERENCES AND INNOVATIONS TO CARVE OUT ITS OWN IDENTITY"

» A period was placed in the title to distinguish the game from the long-running radio and TV cowboy show of the same name.

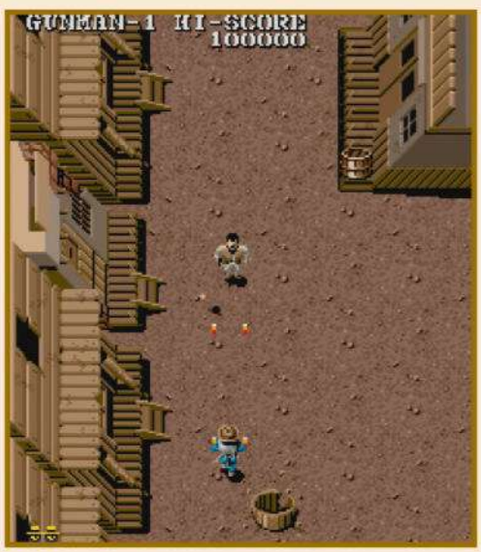
***Gun Smoke* is basically *Commando* in the Wild West.** Released just five months after *Commando*, *Gun Smoke* is another vertical-scrolling shooter, only soldier Super Joe is replaced by sheriff Billy Bob, and the enemy battlefield is swapped for a Wild West hick town where no-good bandits with names like Pig Joe and Fat Man are terrorising the locals. Regardless of scenario, another lone hero goes up against thousands of foes, guns blazing.

Capcom certainly felt this way, as it grouped *Gun Smoke* with *Commando* and its official sequel *Mercs* in the 1998 compilation *Capcom Generations 4*. Yet fans of *Gun Smoke* know that the game is no lazy *Commando* reskin, as it features enough differences and innovations to carve out its own identity.

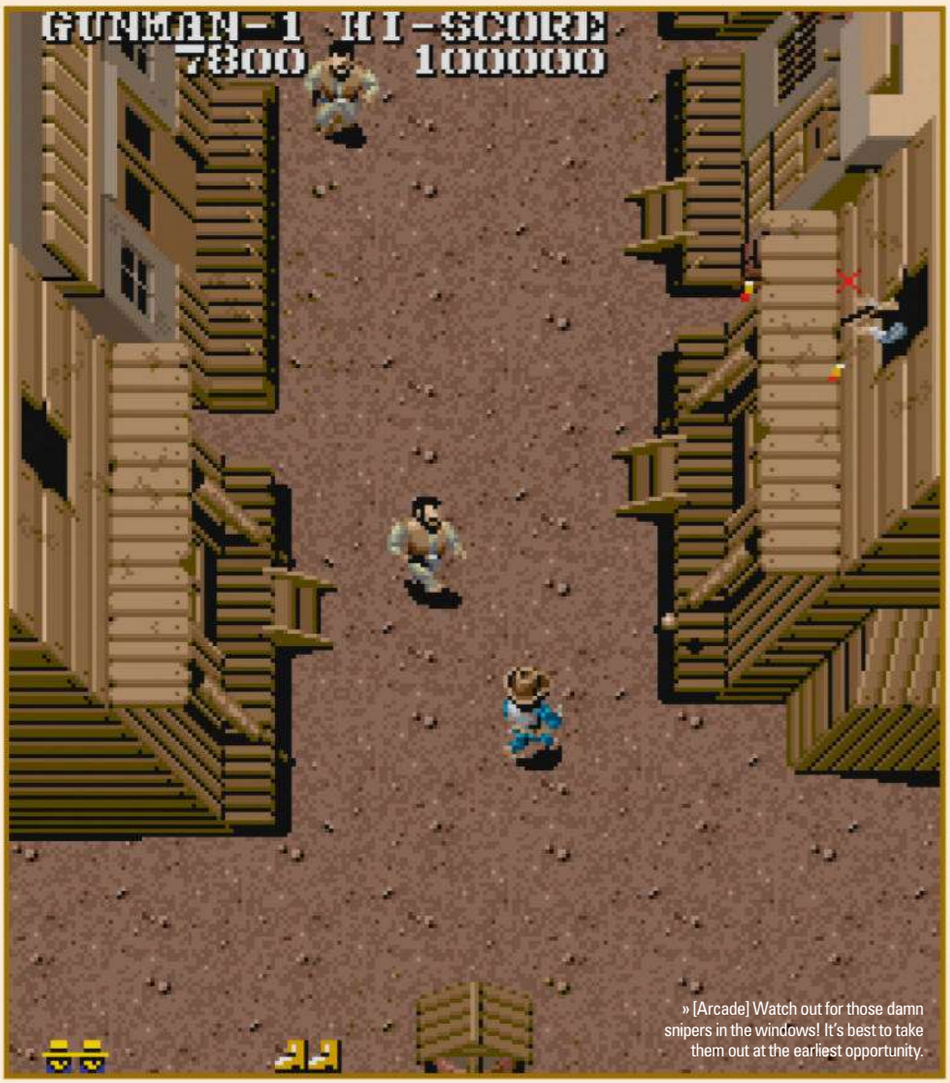
Crucially, the game had no input from *Commando* creator Tokuro Fujiwara. While he was busy planning *The Speed Rumbler* (*Commando* with cars, basically), his colleague Yoshiki Okamoto was developing *Gun Smoke* as an auto-scrolling shooter. As a result, the gameplay actually has more in common with Capcom's *1942*, as you're pushed ever onwards into enemy territory and can only shoot forwards (like *1942*, this challenges players to deal with enemies who spawn behind you). Although you can't turn around or shoot over your shoulder, a novel three-button fire system is used which lets you shoot in six directions, depending on which buttons or combination of buttons you tap. The trick is to quickly fan your fingers over the fire buttons as this produces a spread pattern that offers the best chance of surviving *Gun Smoke*'s ten stages.

Also helping you avoid constant instant death is a power-up system where you shoot wooden barrels to reveal bonuses. Billy Bob can't lob projectiles like Super Joe, but he can power-up his rifle to make it shoot faster and farther. You can also pick up better cowboy boots that speed up your movement. The ultimate upgrade though is your horse which, once astride, giddies you up and acts like a force-field, protecting you from several hits. Without your trusty steed progress in the later stages is nigh on impossible [Surely neigh on - Ed]. The end of each stage is similar to *Commando* – the scrolling stops and you're rushed by a bunch of regular enemies. However, a boss character with a distinct attack also enters the fray, making a tough task even trickier.

One small mercy is the continue option, which means unlike *Commando*, you can insert another credit and carry on where you left off. But should we be thankful for this 'feature'? No ordinary Joe could complete *Gun Smoke* without using multiple credits, so we can assume that the pinch points, difficulty spikes and overall length were *by design* to keep the quarters flowing.



» [Arcade] The game begins with a one-on-one duel – then millions of his mates turn up.



» [Arcade] Watch out for those damn snipers in the windows! It's best to take them out at the earliest opportunity.

Hilariously, in the US there were two versions of the game, and the later version (showing a 1986 copyright date on the screen) makes early progress even harder by swapping the third stage with the notoriously difficult sixth stage (which is a true test of stamina, being three times longer than every other stage in the game). Equally hilarious, though for different reasons, is the special version for the German market. The country's strict laws regarding violence in media resulted in *Commando* being released there as *Space Invasion*, with all bad men replaced by bad robots, and it was a similar story for *Gun Smoke*. The title stayed the same, but some of the in-game sprites were altered and the wanted posters for each of the game's bosses were edited to make them all look like straight-to-video cyborgs.

***Gun Smoke* was released worldwide in October 1985.** In North America it was distributed by Romstar and primarily available as a conversion kit for cabs with vertical monitors (plus dedicated 'quick kits' were available for *Pac-Man* and *Centipede* machines). In the coin-op industry mag *Play Meter*, Frank Seninsky selected it as his top conversion kit of January 1986, calling it "a number-one kit with great graphics". It was also well received in the UK by Clare Edgeley of *CVG*, who noted that it was "one of the most popular games in Japan at present", and called it "a sure winner… very fast and packed with action".

As with most Capcom arcade hits, *Gun Smoke* was converted to a number of home systems. The NES version was developed by Capcom itself, with Okamoto's input, so it's unsurprisingly the most considered conversion. There are only six stages but several new gameplay elements have been introduced. The main one is a shop system where the loot you collect can be spent on upgrades and even new weapons. In addition, to battle each boss you first have to first locate their wanted poster which is hidden somewhere in each stage: if you don't snag the poster, the stages just keep looping until you do.

The Commodore 64 version lacks these extra features and is closer to the coin-op (albeit with two stages missing). The other 8-bit versions for the Amstrad CPC,

CONVERSION CAPERS

ARE WE TALKING THE WILD BUNCH OR WILD WILD WEST?

NES

This is how you do a home conversion. It emulates the arcade game within the limits of the hardware and adds enough new features (like a simple shop system) to keep you pushing on, despite the difficulty. There are fewer stages than the coin-op, but they feel more varied.

C64

The presentation is poor, with its oversized sprites and awful in-game music, and it scrolls at a snail's pace, but it plays OK-ish. The C64 deserved and could have handled a far superior conversion. Indeed, the *Outlaw* demo game bundled with *SEUCK* is more fun than this.

AMSTRAD CPC

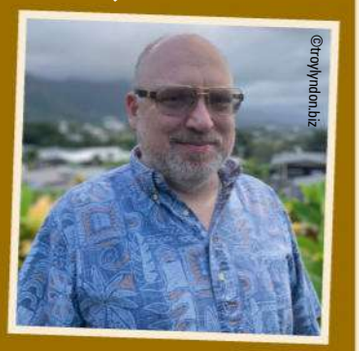
As related in the main text, this started out as an unofficial clone released in Europe as *Desperado*. It's decent but deviates heavily from the coin-op – you don't even get to ride a horse, yet your enemies do! It's also quite slow and the stages drag on foreeeever.

» [Arcade] Try and avoid the bull. If you accidentally shoot him, he starts raging and charges down the screen.

"THE ULTIMATE UPGRADE IS YOUR HORSE WHICH, ONCE ASTRIDE, GIDDIES YOU UP AND ACTS LIKE A FORCE-FIELD"

DEVELOPER Q&A

TROY LYNDON ON CODING THE C64 VERSION OF GUN SMOKE



» Programmer Troy Lyndon converted a number of Capcom games to the C64 and PC.

How did you land the job of converting *Gun Smoke* to the Commodore 64?
My company at the time was Lyndon And Associates. In early 1987 we signed a 15-title deal with Capcom USA to convert its many coin-op games to the PC and C64. *Gun Smoke* was one of them.

Did you receive any assets or assistance from Capcom, including access to the coin-op?
Yes, Capcom provided all the graphics and we used software to convert them into a format we could use. So we did have to create the graphics, but not from scratch. Capcom also provided the music – its resources were amazing. I remember having the insides of the coin-op laid out on my desk. The monitor had the tube behind it, so it wasn't even enclosed [don't try this at home kids].

What would you say was the most challenging aspect from a coding point of view?
I wrote the main code on PC which we converted to the C64. My colleague Michael Knox, now deceased, wrote the graphics driver. On the C64 the difficulty was in achieving a smooth scroll, while reusing sprites in the vertical blank.

What are your memories of working with Michael?
Mike was a wonderful person and my best friend for a long part of my life. We later created a new company, Park Place Productions, and we went on to create the first 3D *Madden* football game for the Sega Genesis in 1990, and again in 1992. We also developed the first *NHL Hockey* for the Genesis in 1991.

***Gun Smoke* was advertised and reviewed in UK magazines, but it was never actually released. Do you know why?**
Are you sure? I thought it had been released. I guess Capcom's main business outside of the arcades was the NES, so it spent about $500,000 with us just as an experiment to publish their games for home computers. In the end, it kept its main focus and scaled back its focus on computers.

How pleased were you with the finished game and the reaction it received?
The game was fun, just like the coin-op game. It was an interesting way to keep the normal gameplay dynamics of shooting games, but instead of shooting alien spacecraft you could shoot bad guys in the Old West. I think we made a fun game of it. I don't remember fine-tuning the later levels, so perhaps that's something we could have improved.

ZX SPECTRUM

A conversion of the CPC version in which monochrome sprites are used throughout, making it tricky to avoid enemy fire. The game scrolls at a decent clip, until more than one enemy is on-screen and then it chugs. Sound is limited to pips and pops. This is not a good conversion.

MSX

Similar to the Spectrum version, except that some coloured sprites are used to improve the look of the game. On the downside, the active screen size is reduced which makes an already constrained playing area even tighter. This makes the Speccy game look good.

MASTER SYSTEM

An odd one this, as it's an unlicensed conversion from Prosoft that was released in 1990 for the SMS (and also the MSX). It's actually based on the NES version, but this one only features three slapdash stages and it suffers from annoying and jerky block scrolling, so unfortunately it's nowhere near as excellent.

THE DEADLY DOZEN

THESE OUTLAWS ARE WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE (PREFERABLY DEAD)

MASTER

Reward: $10,000

Master waits for you at the edge of town and will open fire with his Winchester rifle. When you hit him he'll go prone for a few seconds, then pop up and continue firing.

How To Beat Them: You can't hurt him when he's prone so use this as an opportunity to clear away the regular baddies. There's a handy POW in the barrel on the left.

ROY

Reward: $12,000

Roy hops around the screen, pinging an infinite number of knives at you. He doesn't throw them wildly however, he'll try and target where you're standing.

How To Beat Them: Keep moving to avoid his knives the best you can. He's invincible when in the air, so anticipate where he's going to land and unload on him.

NINJA

Reward: $15,000

Ninja is a lot like Roy, only he leaps around a lot more and his throwing stars are faster and more accurate. When hit he'll vanish and appear elsewhere, as ninjas do.

How To Beat Them: Use the same tactics that worked on Roy, firing when he briefly stops jumping. When he teleports, try and clear the screen of other enemies.

GUTTER

Reward: $15,000

This brute will fling two boomerangs that whiz around the screen and can be difficult to dodge. He doesn't do much else, preferring to lurk at the top of the screen.

How To Beat Them: This is the first boss where we'd recommend targeting his projectiles to make life easier. Offence is the best strategy, so hit him head on.

PIG JOE

Reward: $20,000

Pig Joe will throw sticks of dynamite in your direction. He also spits deadly fireballs at you, as Pig Joes do. When he's not attacking he jumps around the top of the screen.

How To Beat Them: The dynamite is no bother but those fireballs are a real problem. Keep your distance and don't stop moving to avoid being barbecued.

WOLF CHIEF

Reward: $80,000

Wolf Chief appears three times during this stage but you can only engage him properly on the third occasion. He brandishes a powerful three-barrel shotgun.

How To Beat Them: This is a tough battle, requiring some defensive tactics. Stay low down the screen, to avoid the shotgun fire, and try and hit the chief from the side.

GOLDSMITH

Reward: $20,000

Goldsmith will attack you with his double-barrelled rifle. When he's not firing he spends most of the time rolling around on the floor, dodging your bullets.

How To Beat Them: Obviously you can't hit him when he's rolling, so spend the time clearing his clan and then target him hard when he finally stands.

LOS PUBRO

Reward: $25,000

This guy has six health bars but don't let that worry you as he's one of the easier bosses. He's fairly static and shoots at you with a rapid-fire double pistol.

How To Beat Them: It's possible to position yourself between his bullets and take him out in seconds. Otherwise rely on the usual move-and-shoot tactics.

FAT MAN

Reward: $30,000

Fat Man has a fat machine gun that he likes to fire constantly. Given his girth he doesn't jump about. Instead he just patrols his area with extreme prejudice.

How To Beat Them: Hitting bosses from the side is a useful strategy, yet here it is mandatory, as Fat Man will absolutely waste you if attack head on.

WINGATE FAMILY

Reward: $80,000

The two Wingate brothers flank you from the sides with their rifles, then ol' man Wingate appears at the top of the screen and goes bat crazy with his machine gun.

How To Beat Them: You can't! Seriously, we've seen videos of people somehow doing it, but it looks impossible to us mere mortals. Shoot, move and pray, we guess.

THE 13TH BOSS?

Hidden in the code is this additional wanted poster, showing a moody-looking boss who was removed from the final game for unknown reasons. Maybe he was just too damn yella.

» [PS2] An early preview screenshot from Capcom's original *Red Dead Revolver* shows what *Gun Smoke* might have looked like in 3D.

» [NES] The Nintendo version features a number of new weapons which you purchase from the local townspeople.

Spectrum and MSX are markedly different, featuring five stages with their own unique bosses. Curiously, the third stage sees you floating down a river on a raft, and inexplicably, there is no horse power-up. What kind of runt cowboy has no horse? The answer is one in an unofficial *Gun Smoke* clone. The story here is that Spanish developer Topo Soft developed a copy of the arcade game and released it in Europe under the title *Desperado*. Then, when US Gold acquired the licence in a multi-game deal with Capcom, it simply commandeered Topo Soft's game and put that out with a new title screen and no other changes. US Gold also planned to publish the US-developed C64 version in Europe, and even sent review copies to the mags, but in the end it was never released (*Zzap!64*'s 15% review may or may not have played a part in its downfall). As it would happen, the best home-computer version appeared later in the shape of *Wanted* (aka *Outlaw*), another unofficial clone that was developed by Infogrames.

The first arcade perfect conversion arrived in 1998, as part of the aforementioned *Capcom Generations 4* collection for PlayStation and Saturn. It has since become a regular fixture on Capcom compilations, including *Capcom Classics Collection* (2005) and *Capcom Arcade Cabinet* (2013). You might have missed the game on the recent *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium* collection as it was bizarrely renamed *Gan Sumoku*. This was most probably done to avoid any confusion with the old CBS series *Gunsmoke* (which is also why the original arcade game was technically titled *Gun.Smoke*).

Before this feature rides off into the sunset we'll leave you with a golden piece of trivia. Although Capcom never released a sequel to *Gun Smoke*, in 2000 Okamoto was compelled to reimagine the game as a 3D shooter (in a similar way to how *Maximo* built on *Ghosts 'N Goblins*). The new game's eventual title? *Red Dead Revolver*. You probably know the rest. After development stalled, Capcom bailed and the game was acquired by Rockstar who moulded it into a more story-driven adventure and released it in 2004 as the first entry in the celebrated *Red Dead* series. Obviously, nothing of *Gun Smoke* remains in *Red Dead Revolver* – except that dynamite-throwing boss Pig Josh sure looks familiar. We wonder if he had an older brother? ✱

"YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED THE GAME ON THE RECENT CAPCOM ARCADE 2ND STADIUM COLLECTION AS IT WAS BIZARRELY RENAMED GAN SUMOKU"

LONE HEROES

MORE CAPCOM GAMES WHERE SUPERMEN BATTLED INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS

COMMANDO

Super Joe must rush eight areas swarming with enemy soldiers and vehicles, armed only with a machine gun, a handful of grenades and a never say die attitude. For many this is the original one-man army game.

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

The game that introduced us to the brave knight Arthur and his unfeasibly clean pants. Here he ventures into the Demon Realm for the first time, on a quest to rescue a princess from the clutches of darkness.

SECTION Z

Before *Side Arms* and *Forgotten Worlds* there was *Section Z*, Capcom's first game to feature a floaty jetpack-man facing off against entire alien civilisations. The title comes from the fact there are 26 stages from A to Z.

TROJAN

Similar to *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, only it's set in a post-apocalyptic world overrun by raiders. The addition of a shield, to defend yourself, and a health bar means it's far more forgiving than its inspiration, but no less intense.

STRIDER

Strider Hiryu's debut is a gorgeous-looking game in which our hero is tasked with saving humanity from an evil dictator and his minions. Plot aside, this is a platformer that deftly cartwheel jumps over convention.

ESSENTIAL GAME
SUPER GLOVE BALL

You don't really have many choices when it comes to games for the Power Glove, and given that *Bad Street Brawler* could finish third in a two-horse race, Rare's *Super Glove Ball* essentially wins by default. It plays a little like a 3D variant of *Arkanoid* – you use the glove to throw, catch and hit the ball into the blocks. However, there's an extra element to the game as clearing walls allows you to move to different rooms within a maze, with the goal being to find an exit and escape.

Power Glove fact

■ There's a crucial difference between the Japanese and North American Power Gloves – the Japanese version uses the Famicom expansion connector, rather than a NES controller connector.

Power Glove

» PLATFORM: NES **» YEAR:** 1989 **» COST:** $75 (launch), £150+ (today, boxed), £130+ (today, unboxed)

Do you want to look like a cyborg hacker living life on the edge? If so, the Power Glove is for you – the deliberately cyberpunk look has ostentatious wires connecting the hand sensor to an arm-mounted keypad, all with a grey and black colour scheme. Developed by AGE and sold by Mattel in the US and PAX in Japan, the glove uses a sensor bar with ultrasonic transmitters to offer basic motion controls, as well as offering standard NES control options and a numeric keypad.

The look and marketing of the Power Glove, including a spot in the movie *The Wizard*, went a long way towards selling the device. Only two games officially included support for the Power Glove, and it was actually fairly wretched to play most games with, but it sold nearly a million units regardless. The peripheral retains quite a bit of value today – the Power Glove prized by those who never got the opportunity to own one in their youth, as well as those who seek it for its sheer notoriety and ironic value. *

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

CRACK THE SCENE

CRACKING GAMES IS A DANGEROUS PASSION, BUT ONE THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE. SCENE MEMBERS RECALL THEIR EXPERIENCES WORKING BEHIND THE CURTAINS IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES, RISKING JAIL TIME TO COMPETE AT WHO WAS THE FASTEST AT CRACKING

WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI

Back in the Eighties, many would buy a new game after reading about it in mags like *Crash* or *Zzap!64*. But that was not all: perhaps you called your friend to swap floppies. Or you visited your favourite BBS to check what new games were available. It wasn't all fun, though. Groups such as Razor 1911, Fairlight, Paradox and THG were infamous for cracking games on the C64, Amiga and PC, often on the very same day of release. They were working day and night, risking jail to crack games.

Except for later endeavours such as Twilight or Crazy Bytes, in the Eighties and early Nineties groups were working only for the thrill and fun of the challenge. The first cracked games began appearing in the early Eighties, often signed with the nickname of the 'artist'. Soon, crackers began to work together in groups, since that made it easier to access original releases and find people who could get the job done as quickly as possible.

"Sometimes it was about the quality of a release, but most times it was all about being the first to release a cracked game," remembers Pontus Berg, an early member of Fairlight. Pontus lived in a small city outside Lund, Sweden. In the early Eighties, it was not easy for him to access new releases of Commodore 64 games. "The first time I played a cracked game, I saw that it bore a signature and that made me want to join too," Pontus says, mentioning a friend of a friend who already had his own cracking group that he soon joined. "I really wanted to see how the code of a game worked. I dedicated all my waking hours to it: reading books, looking at machine code monitors. It was my full-on passion."

Pontus joined Fairlight in late-1988, mentioning it as a lucky break, as there wasn't much competition on the scene. "I was still getting originals via post, sending them back after cracking. Before the BBS, we tried to crunch files as much as possible in order to fit the content of a disk on tape. But that changed with the arrival of the modem and the BBS, after that the scene grew pretty fast." He comments how, in a way, the pyramid grew under his feet during his time at Fairlight.

Cracking a Commodore 64 game took, on average, up to eight hours, mostly because of the long time to crunch the file. "Today? I could do it in 40 minutes!" laughs Pontus. Among the many games he hacked on C64, he specifically mentions *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon*. He spent 11 months on it, while the community also got together to complete a full-on strategy guide, which greatly improved on the original documentation in the game's box.

One of the founders of Razor 1911, Sector 9, mentions growing up in Norway and how easy it was to get pirated games "as early as 1983, as long as one had a Datasette, you could get as many games as you wanted". He mentions starting cracking games in 1985, learning a bit of assembler, then founding Razor 1911 in October of the same year. The group started as a demogroup, developing music and graphics, since, as he mentions, "We didn't have access to any original games, so we couldn't release anything that anybody had not released first. Our first cracked games were only released in late-1989 on the Amiga." Often, cracked games came with a graphical intro or demo, called cracktros, often not developed by the crackers. Sector 9 mentions, as an organiser for Razor, how they were his responsibility, "I

» [C64] The Fairlight cracktro for *International Karate* on the Commodore 64

image ©

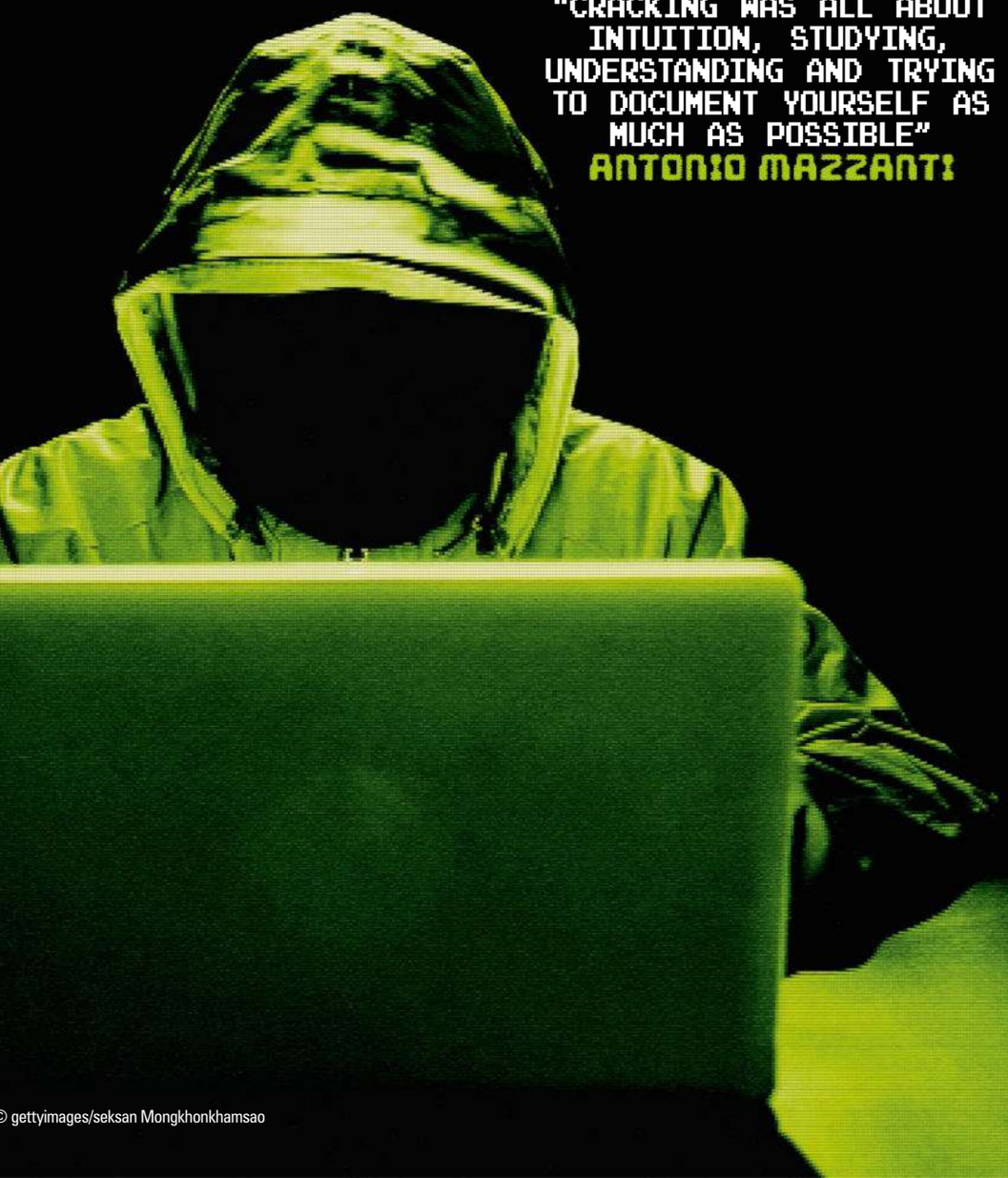
THE SCENE

» [Amiga] *Dungeon Master* was a notoriously difficult game to crack on the Amiga.

» Antonio at his PC desk (1993) on the phone with his trusty US Robotics HST modem.

» A Razor 1911 dinner: Sector 9 is on the right, Antonio on the sofa.

"CRACKING WAS ALL ABOUT INTUITION, STUDYING, UNDERSTANDING AND TRYING TO DOCUMENT YOURSELF AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE"
ANTONIO MAZZANTI

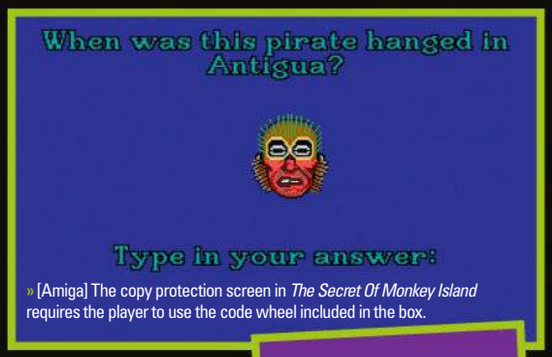


© gettyimages/seksan Mongkhonkhamsao

made graphics and code for cracking intros which were released with the games, and for demos that were released on their own."

Groups tended to function with a full-on hierarchy, between organisers, suppliers and couriers. An organiser would plan and co-ordinate the transfer of uncracked games from the suppliers to the crackers, then passing them on to the team of members (couriers) who in turn would distribute the game to BBSs around the world. "As organisers we would also try to shield the crackers from too much external interference" Sector 9 says. "Not only did they need to be able to do their crucial job in peace, but also some of them did not really want to take part in the fast-paced cracking scene."

Pontus mentions that with the arrival of the Amiga, cracking games became much more complicated, with the work taking more hours and technical skills. In 1994 he would leave the scene, after starting to study law and getting married. Around the mid-Nineties, the scene started to change, with many groups starting to jump ship to consoles such as the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo as well as the PC. Antonio Mazzanti, working under the pseudonym Randall Flagg, mentions joining Razor in late 1992, "I was ▶



» [Amiga] The copy protection screen in *The Secret Of Monkey Island* requires the player to use the code wheel included in the box.

» [Amiga] *Monkey Island 2* also included a copy protection similar to the one in the previous game in the series.

Black Wolf Level:0
Stats: STA CHR STR INT WIS SKL
24 16 23 22 15 19
Experience:0 Hit Points=12
You are in a well-lighted area.
The door won't open. You may:
(1) Examine the door.
(2) Force the door.
(3) Use a key.
(4) Break an enchantment.
(0) Leave it.

» [Amiga] *Alternate Reality* took Pontus a year to fully crack.

» [Amiga] *I Play 3D Soccer* featured a notoriously hard to crack protection system.

▶ the first ever to work on the PC scene, since no one else was doing it at the time. I worked with them for two years, then went on to join Eclipse then Hybrid."

Antonio recalls it all started with *Maniac Mansion*. "Back then, around 1989, no one was cracking Lucasarts games, so we were forced to photocopy manuals to play them. It did not take long to decide I would start specialising myself on Lucasarts' titles. It took me a full year to crack *Maniac Mansion*". But it would be his work on I*ndiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* that would get him an invitation to join Razor from the head honcho.

One of Antonio's biggest achievements in his cracking career is another Lucasarts classic: *Day Of The Tentacle*. "They introduced several modifications to SCUMM, basically you had to forget everything you knew and start from scratch. A group had faked a release, uploading a version that did not work, hoping that the cracker would finish it before people started playing. But I was the one to, so to speak, crack the case." Antonio also mentions a tender moment when, years later, he met David Fox and received forgiveness for his early work on *Maniac Mansion*.

Antonio speaks of a generally friendly competition in the scene in the mid-Nineties. "After we finished our job, we would create instructions for the game, in the so-called nfo file, then the release would be shared on the main BBS of Razor. The timestamp of uploading the release was essential in deciding who won the race." That is why the games were assigned based on experience, with most releases being generally simple to crack, while the more complicated ones went to the expert crackers. Antonio mentions how games on PC never really used to have graphical intros, like they used to on Amiga, since programming was much more complicated on a PC. "There was too much in-fighting to get the release out first, most times we did not even have time to program a demo," he comments.

Despite the scene being made mostly of shy programmers, they would often meet in person. The first gatherings in the mid-Eighties were called copy parties and started in Germany and The Netherlands.

» [Amiga] A still from *Voyage*, Razor 1911's Amiga demo.

» [PlayStation] A still from a PlayStation Paradox cracktro.

NOTORIOUS CRACKING

RAZOR 1911

■ Founded in Norway in 1986 by Doctor No, Insane TTM and Sector 9, the group was at first a demogroup only, beginning to release cracked games in late-1986. The group also ran the disk mag *Propaganda* until 1995.

FAIRLIGHT

■ Strider and Black Shadow founded Fairlight in Sweden in 1987, after leaving WCC (West Coast Crackers). Strider had managed to bribe a train conductor to bring Commodore 64 games to his fellow member to crack them. Fairlight became the first group to release games on Super Nintendo.

PARADOX

■ Founded in 1989 by Danish and French members of the hacking scene, Paradox worked for two years on the Amiga Scene. It was later disbanded and in 1994 it started cracking Sega Mega Drive titles. Paradox was the first to crack, in 2020, the notoriously difficult Denuvo protection.

» [Amiga] *RoboCop 3* on Amiga was famously sold with an expensive dongle which had to be plugged in to make the game work.

» [Amiga] Here's the intro for *AD&D: Ravenloft* that Antonio cracked under his Randall Flagg pseudonym.

These were invite-only parties strictly for members of established demo and cracking groups. Sector 9 tells us, "During these gatherings, groups would compete in making music, graphics, demos or cracking games. The gatherings gradually spread to the rest of Western Europe and by the mid-Nineties they had become law abiding mega-events such as Assembly or The Gathering with thousands of people attending annually."

> "IT WAS NEVER FOR THE MONEY, BUT THE KNOWLEDGE TO BE PART OF SOMETHING"
> SECTOR 9

While, in Europe, governments often ignored the problem, legal risk was still a problem. In the late-Nineties, police operations specifically made to crack down on groups were organised. Operation Fastlink, created by the US government, was specifically to take down Fairlight. Sector 9, recalls narrowly avoiding a police raid only because he had moved away ten days before, "This went down in 1993, I never went back working with Razor full time after that."

Despite the scene and the technology changing over the years, everyone seems to agree on one thing: how the scene really changed their lives. Sector 9 mentions how he was surprised by how loyal people were to an idea he had at 14 years old. "It still amazes me how much money, energy and effort people would want to devote just to have a name and feel as part of a community. It was never for money, but the knowledge to be part of something."

Pontus Berg currently manages the Fairlight Youtube channel, interviewing members of the scene. "After 1994, I became sober for a while, then I came back. I believe cracking is an educational and interesting hobby. While there is still competition on who can crack a game first, it is also important to develop the best crack around. Also, the social aspect: being part of a community and meeting all the people I worked with in the years in the scene."

Antonio also agrees, saying, "It was like competing for who had the biggest ego of all. There was no information sharing, while today it's quite easier to find info, back then if someone knew a way to more efficiently crack something, they would keep it a secret. Even between team members little info actually circulated. It was all about intuition, studying, understanding and documents." He concludes with a note of sadness, "It was a fantastic world that will never be again." ✱

HARD NUTS TO CRACK

SOME GAMES USED SYSTEMS WHICH MADE THEM HARD TO CRACK

Despite games generally using similar copy protection methods, in the Eighties and early Nineties there were several games with unique protections. Among these was *I Play 3D Soccer*, by Italian studio Simulmondo, which featured its copy-protection method in the starting menu. If one removed it, the game had several protection checks, which, if failed, would make later matches in the game unwinnable. The Amiga version of *Hook*, after the initial protection check, had another one later, hidden in the code, which would cause a key item to disappear from the game. *RoboCop 3* used an expensive dongle that had to be plugged in the second joystick port. Crackers hacked it pretty fast, so that players were unhappily paying more for a game only because of its complicated protection system. Most famously, *Dungeon Master* on Amiga featured several checks, such as fuzzy bits on disk sectors, which change each time they are read. If the game does not detect the fuzzy bits, it would stop the player before entering the dungeon. Additional anti-piracy checks exist in the code, including checksums and code hidden as images in the graphics file. While these checks did not prevent the game from working, they would significantly slow down progress for the player.

GROUPS

THE MOST ACTIVE GROUPS IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

THG (THE HUMBLE GUYS)

■ One of the first PC-specific groups in the early Eighties, THG also created the nfo description file as a standard. It was also the first group to develop animated and graphical intros for the PC scene.

TDT (THE DREAM TEAM)

■ The Dream Team was a group mainly dedicated to PC, formed in the Netherlands in 1989 and active until 1996. In its (relatively) short history it managed to crack a notable number of games, such as *Simon The Sorcerer*, *Ultima Serpent Isle* and *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*.

Super Bomberman: Panic Bomber W

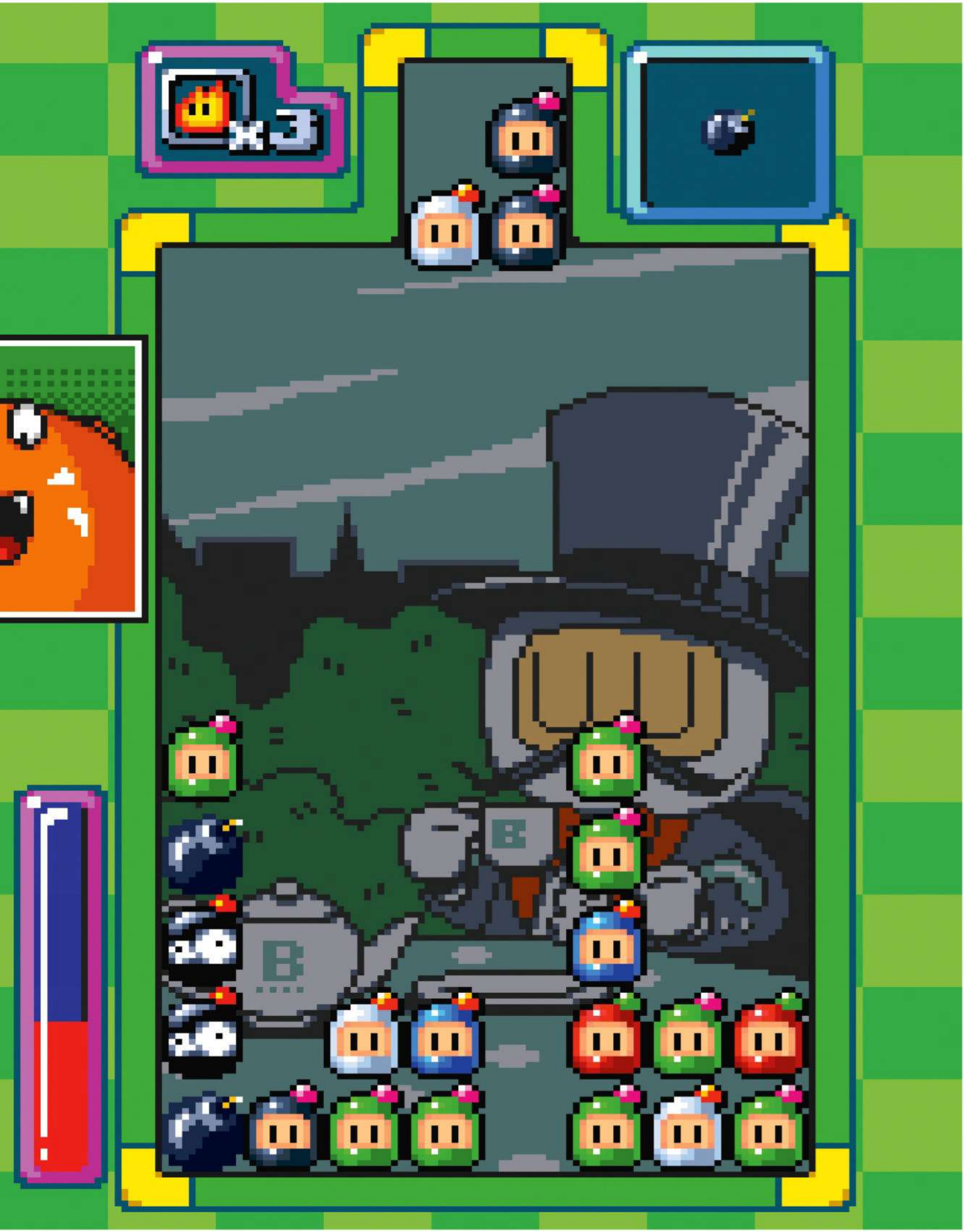
LIGHT THE FUSE, BRING THE BOOM

» SNES » 1995 » HUDSON SOFT

Back in the Nineties, it seemed as though a puzzle outing was an inevitability for any character or series that was particularly popular. Plenty of them borrowed an established puzzle game like *Tetris* or *Columns* as a base, and some spin-offs even got rebranded with other properties – just look at *Puyo Puyo*. However, some games like *Dr Mario* and *Panic Dizzy* were created from the ground up, and *Bomberman*'s puzzle spin-off series was one of those original efforts.

Super Bomberman: Panic Bomber W plays a little like *Columns*, in that your goal is to match coloured Bomberman icons in lines of three or more – vertically, horizontally or diagonally. These drop in groups of three, but rotate in a square formation rather than the vertical formation of *Columns*. Clearing extra icons or creating combos rewards you with bombs, which push up from the bottom of your screen, and every so often you'll get to drop an active bomb which allows you to detonate your stockpile and send garbage to your opponent. This can change how your existing icons stack up, potentially leading to even more bombs being generated. It's not quite a classic like *Puzzle Fighter* or *Puyo Puyo*, but it plays pretty well.

What I particularly like about this version of the game is the whole world-tour aspect of it, in part because the UK is one of the early levels. It's always fascinating to see how your home country is viewed by people elsewhere, and there are some cute images of Bomberman as Sherlock Holmes, an upper class man drinking tea and a researcher looking for the Loch Ness monster. The best bit, though? That would be Metal Bomber, a punk-style chap who serves as the boss for the stage, whose most notable trait is his love of "hard music" – a bit of a throwback, but a nice display of cultural appreciation all the same.


x3

SEGA REALLY BROUGHT HOME THE GOODS WHEN IT SNUCK SPLIT-SCREEN STEALTH, SLAPSTICK CHARM AND UNIQUE CHARACTERS INTO ARCADES THROUGH THE LOVABLE BONANZA BROS. JOIN US AS WE INVESTIGATE THE CRIMINALLY GOOD COIN-OP GAME, ALONG WITH ITS CONVERSIONS AND SPIN-OFFS

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

» [Arcade] Robo and Mobo scarper across rooftops at the start of the game.

For all their supposed stealth credentials, the Bonanza Bros have a dubious track record of keeping a low profile since their original arcade heist. Take a glance at their prolific police record and you'll find evidence of Robo and Mobo being present at the scenes of conversions and spin-offs across a litany of consoles and home computers. Those pesky yellow thieves just keep getting away with it.

Labelling the brothers as robbers is perhaps a little unfair though, as their criminal status is somewhat up for debate. The introduction screens of the arcade game depict a mystery client recruiting the pair for a mission to help with "cleaning up Badville once and for all" by gathering evidence from "crooked joints that are run by counterfeiters, thieving bankers and cheating casino operators". On the other hand, the same sequence on some home ports tells a slightly different backstory of the brothers being "reformed villains" who are asked simply to "test security" at a series of swanky establishments.

Opinions also seem divided about how human the brothers really are. Some versions of the Mega Drive cover artwork portray them as real people, albeit in cartoon form, while in the Master System game alone their sprites are pale-skinned instead of yellow. To add to the

CONVERSION CAPERS

TRACING THE BROS ACROSS PLATFORM BORDERS

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The AI might not be too smart, but the basic gameplay from the arcade original is here and the backgrounds are bright and detailed. The performance lags in two-player mode, and the controls are a bit cumbersome too.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Greyscale graphics and a soundtrack of silence give the Spectrum version a stark ambience. You almost get the sense of being part of some serious criminal activity. Despite the darker atmosphere, the game plays smoothly.

C64

■ The most enjoyable 8-bit home-computer version by some way. There's cheerful in-game music and an on-screen map to help you navigate level layouts. The characterful animations also do a great job of conveying the goofy vibe of the arcade game.

AMIGA

■ Developed by Twilight, which did a fantastic job of making a Sega game look and feel great on the Amiga. As with the other home-computer versions, using a single joystick button to shoot and jump takes a bit of getting used to.

ATARI ST

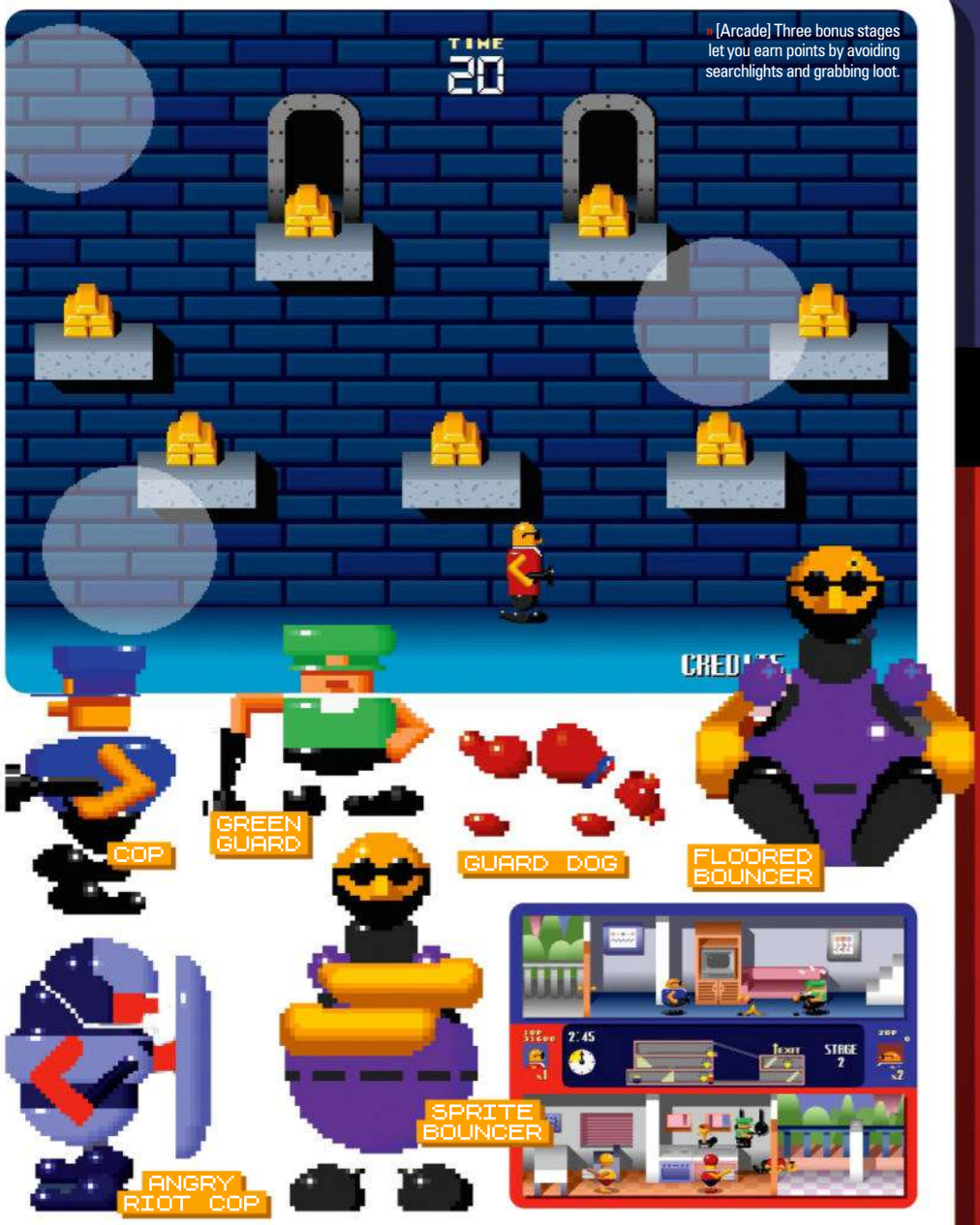
■ Created alongside the Amiga game and very similar. The only differences are background layers of art blacked out, presumably to aid performance, and the sound effects are simpler. We miss the cackle sound when you bag goods.

» [Arcade] Banana skins, rakes and drink cans can slip you up and draw attention.

confused intelligence available to us, the Sega Genesis game led US audiences to believe the duo are in fact named Mike and Spike, with the manual describing them as "the most famous investigators around" and not bad guys at all. The title of that version of the game was also extended to become *Bonanza Brothers*. So just who really are these slippery characters?

What we know for sure is that the duo burst onto the coin-op scene in 1990 with a lovably goofy style that was quite unlike anything that had come before. The game was created by a small team at Sega including the artist and designer Manabu Kusunoki, whose later work includes *Panzer Dragoon*. The team developed the game for the relatively new Sega System 24 arcade board, which was able to read games from floppy disks and hence allowed arcade operators to swap between games easily (you can read more about it in issue 244). This hardware also afforded the *Bonanza*

"I WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING EASY-GOING AND SILLY, IN CONTRAST TO THE SERIOUS ATMOSPHERE OF MANY GAMES"
MANABU KUSUNOKI



» [Arcade] Three bonus stages let you earn points by avoiding searchlights and grabbing loot.

MASTER SYSTEM

■ The only port to lack a two-player mode. This does have a big benefit for solo players in that you get a full-screen view. The difficulty is forgiving and some new enemies are introduced including a ninja, making it a fun and interesting version to play.

MEGA DRIVE

■ This very faithful conversion is hard to fault and wins the prize for appearing across the most platforms. You can play it on compilations available for the Xbox, PlayStation and PSP, plus the Nintendo Wii and the Mega Drive Mini 2.

PC ENGINE

■ The graphics may not be as polished as you might expect given the hardware, but the jazzed-up soundtrack, replete with joyfully tooting horns in high-quality audio, makes the Japan-only PC Engine version worthy of a big shout out.

SHARP X68000

■ The Japan-only Sharp X68000 boasted hardware similar to arcade machines, and it really shows in this excellent conversion. The only real reminder that you're playing a home version comes from the slightly tinnier music and sound effects.

PLAYSTATION 2

■ This one is technically a light remake. For *Sega Classics Collection*, Sega and Japan Art Media updated the graphics, user interface and sound of *Bonanza Bros* and repackaged it with puzzle game *Tant-R*. It's a great way to experience the game.

BOSSING BONANZA BROS

HOW TO PULL OFF THE PERFECT HEIST

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Every bandit needs a partner in crime, so teaming up with a friend to tackle *Bonanza Bros* is really the way to go. Check the level map and split up to gather the goods. Later levels in particular are clearly designed to be played this way.

PICK YOUR MOMENT

There might be a timer ticking but it's worth staying hidden for a while to watch the movement patterns of guards before you sneak past. Step out at the wrong time and you'll get noticed, setting off a chaotic chain reaction and Benny Hill-style chasing.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Get to know how the different enemies move and react. The light-blue guard is extra speedy and aggressive, while waiters will fling plates from a distance and the riot cop can only be stunned from behind due to his huge shield.

USE YOUR SURROUNDINGS

A really fun part of *Bonanza Bros* is the little environmental interactions, from the zip wire you can traverse in the Millionaire's Mansion level, to levers you can pull in The Mint to drop enormous weights onto unsuspecting guards.

WATCH THE CLOCK

Robo and Mobo excel in lightning raids so three minutes is all the time you have to find the swag. It's generally quite a comfortable time limit, but if you get knocked down a few times, get ready to adopt a speedrun-style approach.

» [Arcade] Robo is a master of disguise.

> "THE TEAM'S GOAL WAS TO CREATE THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE THE DRIFTERS, A JAPANESE COMEDY GROUP"
> **MANABU KUSUNOKI**

Bros developers higher-resolution graphics and more colours than they had previously been able to work with, and they made full use of these capabilities, crafting a vibrant cartoon world full of slapstick humour that Kusunoki tells us was partly inspired by one of his favourite childhood comedy series (see Developer Q&A).

Kusunoki and the team at Sega were intent on crafting a light-hearted and cheerful experience that offered a contrast to some of the more serious arcade action of the era. They set *Bonanza Bros* across 12 colourful levels, each one split across several floors of buildings that are ripe targets for robbing, including a bank, a casino, an antique shop and finally a pyramid. The aim of each stage is to sneak past the guards and collect every piece of loot before dashing to the exit and your escape blimp within a three-minute time limit. You can also squish guards behind doors or zap them with your stun gun, but ultimately this won't achieve anything more harmful than temporarily incapacitating your

» [Arcade] This ride lasts longer on the Mega Drive game than it does here on the coin-op.

» [Arcade] Looting a maze-like pyramid is your final, very tough challenge.

pursuers. With no means of wiping anyone out for good, trying your best to snoop around and then swiftly running away once you've been spotted are a big part of the gameplay.

Bonanza Bros had an almost 3D look and feel. For all that the visuals were very cartoony, they also had a slightly futuristic, polygonal-looking style. The game features foreground and background layers to move between, the latter of which is particularly handy for ducking into to hide behind doorways and furniture. All of this gives the illusion of the game having a greater field of depth.

Comedic animations are another highly memorable part of the game, from slips on banana skins and trips on rakes, to Robo and Mobo taking out a mirror to admire themselves when they finish a level. Catchy music and some digitised speech sounds also add an extra dose of charm, with guards yelping as they attack you and Robo and Mobo cackling gleefully each time you collect treasure. The music for the game was composed by Koichi Namiki, whose other musical credits among many for Sega include *Super Hang-On* and *Galaxy Force*.

In an early report back on the coin-op version, *CVG* reported that *Bonanza Bros* was "graphically stunning" and "a very different sort of game that taxes your brains rather than your reflexes". The review also had some

SPIN-OFF SPLENDOUR

THE PUZZLE SERIES THAT FOLLOWED BONANZA BROS

TANT-R

■ In 1992, Sega took the look and feel of *Bonanza Bros* and turned it into *Tant-R*, the first of three arcade games released under the *Puzzle & Action* banner. Think *Point Blank* or *Mario Party* – a series of minigames await. Robo and Mobo make an appearance.

ICHIDANT-R

■ This sequel, released in 1994, continued in the same vein as *Tant-R* with more head-scratching puzzles, but this time with a mediaeval theme. Both games were ported to the Mega Drive, the Game Gear, and the Saturn as part of a *Sega Ages* collection.

TREASURE HUNT

■ The final game in the *Puzzle & Action* trilogy introduced 3D puzzles and a treasure-hunting theme to the mix. It was released for the Japanese Sega Saturn along with some extra features including an RPG-like mode where you could shop for items.

[Arcade] Flattening enemies behind doors is deeply satisfying.

SYSTEM 24
SEGA
COMICAL "REACTION" GAME
BONANZA BROS.
WE'RE GOING TO CAPTURE ALL OF YOUR VALUABLE TREASURES!!
HERE WE GO, YOU GANG OF CLOWNS!!

DEVELOPER Q&A

ORIGINAL DESIGNER MANABU KUSUNOKI TELLS US HOW HE ILLUSTRATED AND STYLED THE BONANZA BROS WORLD

What inspired you to create the unique look and feel of *Bonanza Bros*?
While action games with realistic life-size drawings and powerful racing games were gaining popularity, I wanted to create a completely different impact. I remember thinking that computer graphics could be a kind of art material, and I wondered if it would be possible to create pictures featuring unique colours and textures through trial and error. I also wanted to create something easy-going and silly, in contrast to the serious atmosphere of many games.

How did you and your colleagues work together on the visual design, gameplay and character animations?
The basic game design, such as the characters' actions and gestures, was done by the planner at the time, and I thought about how to express them in a way that was easy to understand and interesting. The team was very small, and I think we were able to communicate effectively. The team's goal for the production was to create the atmosphere of *The Drifters*, a Japanese comedy group I used to watch on TV when I was a child.

Did working with the System 24 arcade board pose any challenges?
I remember that the colouring in System 24 was different from the colouring we had been used to at work, and I had a hard time adjusting it until I got the picture as I intended.

How does it feel to see *Bonanza Bros* made available for so many different systems, including modern platforms?
I am still happy that we were able to transmit unique graphics that did not have many parallels at the time, and that they were accepted. It also gives me a unique feeling that thanks to home videogame machines and mini-hardware, people who were not even born during the arcade era have the opportunity to play these games.

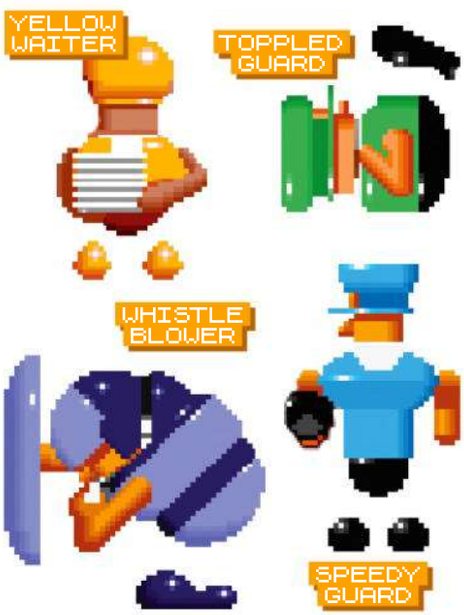
Manabu Kusunoki now works alongside other prestigious Sega alumni at the game development company Arzest. Our thanks to him and to Arzest for their time.

» [Arcade] There's a nice little cutscene at the beginning of each stage where Robo and Mobo scope out their next challenge.

"I AM STILL HAPPY THAT WE WERE ABLE TO TRANSMIT UNIQUE GRAPHICS THAT DID NOT HAVE MANY PARALLELS"
MANABU KUSUNOKI

words of encouragement for any reluctant players who might find the concept unusual or not fast-paced enough, suggesting "try it out – you're only gambling 20p".

Bonanza Bros certainly brought something very different to the arcade. On home computers the nearest point of comparison was perhaps *Keystone Capers*, Activision's 1983 game for the Atari 2600, which featured cruder but somewhat similar yellow characters running across layers of a building in a cops-and-robbers chase. The persistently split-screen framing of the action in *Bonanza Bros* and the emphasis on multiplayer has also drawn comparisons to *Spy Vs Spy* for the Commodore 64.



» [Arcade] Mobo makes a daring zipwire escape.

Despite such comparisons, *Bonanza Bros* was undoubtedly out there doing its own thing. The game was unsurprisingly successful enough in the arcade that Sega quickly chose to pursue home conversions for the Master System and Mega Drive. The company also licensed US Gold to publish versions for 8-bit computers, and also the Amiga and the Atari ST. The size of the game was reduced from twelve to ten levels for these conversions, but otherwise they were remarkably faithful to the coin-op game and in some cases built on it. Gamers in Japan were also able to play versions for the PC Engine and the Sharp X68000.

In recent years, the re-releases of *Bonanza Bros* have just kept on coming. The game arrived on PlayStation and Xbox consoles through various Mega Drive compilations,

» [Arcade] This intro text varies on some conversions to play down the pair's criminal status.

» [Arcade] The poster in the background suggests a $100 dollar reward is available for capturing the bros.

as well as the Nintendo Wii and two mini-consoles, the Mega Drive Mini 2 and the Astro City Mini. Not content with staying within their own game, Robo and Mobo also made a guest appearance in *Sonic And Sega All-Stars Racing* as unlockable and playable kart racers. On top of this, from 1992 onwards three arcade spin-offs were released by Sega under the *Puzzle & Action* banner, putting a minigame spin on the *Bonanza Bros* universe. And then in a move that certainly fits well with the casino level of the original game, in 2009, the company Aristocrat partnered with Sega to release a *Bonanza Bros* slot machine.

The repeated resurfacing of *Bonanza Bros* for new audiences really shows the lasting charm and appeal of the game and its characters. With such a long record of sneaking their way onto different platforms and compilations, we wouldn't be surprised if Robo and Mobo aren't tempted out of retirement at some point in the future for one more heist.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

HARDWARE QUIRKS

Games machines don't have to be much more than nondescript boxes that sit under your TV, yet history is littered with examples of quirky little design choices that give your hardware some character – and here are ten that we love

ATARI 2600
PHYSICAL SWITCHES

With limited processing power and a simple joystick, the idea of navigating an options menu on the Atari 2600 doesn't bear thinking about. The chunky metal switches used to set difficulty and change modes makes it feel like something you'd play with in a workshop, rather than in front of your TV.

ZX SPECTRUM
RUBBER KEYS

We've heard the jokes about how they feel like dead flesh, but when rubber keys help to make the price difference between you having a computer and not having one, they seem a bit less funny. Plus, without them we couldn't have relaunched **Retro Gamer** with "Rubber Love" as a headline.

SUPPLIED BY EVAN AMOS

MASTER SYSTEM
SYSTEM DIAGRAM

Sega used to put odd promotional messages on its Japanese consoles, but it decided on a very fancy and high-tech look for international audiences. The diagram is a bit suspect though – the system prioritises cards over cartridges when it boots up, and controllers appear to control the connection to the TV.

SNES
EJECT BUTTON

There is no *need* for an eject button on the SNES. You *could* just pull the cartridges out like you would on any other console. But is that really as amusing as pushing that big button and watching your copy of *Super Mario World* pop out of the machine like a fresh slice of toast? No, it is not.

LYNX
REVERSIBLE CONTROLS

Historically, game controllers haven't done much to cater for the preferences of players. Your movement control is assigned to one hand, action buttons to the other, and that's that. Hats off to Atari then, for releasing a system that caters to left-handed and right-handed players with two sets of action buttons.

WATARA SUPERVISION
FLEXI-NECK

■ This feature is actually relatively useful – given the lack of a backlight on the Supervision's LCD screen, getting the right lighting was an important part of using the system, which was much easier when you could adjust the angle of the display. We're surprised that other companies never ripped it off.

NEO GEO POCKET COLOR
CLICKY STICK

■ A good d-pad is a wonderful thing, but everyone who has had the pleasure of playing SNK's handheld knows that a microswitched thumbstick is simply *better*. It's precise, it's surprisingly easy to adjust to and it's even satisfying just to hear it in action. Peripheral manufacturers – please make pads with these.

GAMECUBE
CARRY HANDLE

■ If you can't get people back to your place to play some *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, Nintendo ensured that you can bring the action to them. The size and rigidity of the handle actually made it quite uncomfortable, but it came in handy if you were a door-to-door GameCube evangelist back in the day. Not that we did anything like that.

DREAMCAST
VMU WINDOW

■ There are some brilliant uses of the Dreamcast's secondary display, like calling plays in secret in the *NFL 2K* games, as well as really uninspired ones. But whenever we look down at the pad while playing *Soulcalibur* and see a cute little animation of our fighter, we can't help but be glad it's there.

PLAYSTATION 2
ROTATING LOGO

■ Style is a big part of Sony's brand image, so it's really no surprise that it would ensure that whether you used your shiny new PS2 vertically or horizontally, its appearance would be consistent. This feature carried through to the PS2 slimline and PS3, and we were a little sad when the PS3 slim finally dropped it.

IMAGES

STUDIO PROFILE

Karl Jeffery began Images Software in the mid-Eighties, and his company became a reliable development team for many publishers as the transition from 8-bit and 16-bit computers to Sega and Nintendo consoles hit the industry, specialising in coin-op conversions

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON

» Tom Pinnock, Damian Stones, and Andy Pang taking a break from converting *Space Gun* (1990).

Teenager Karl Jeffery started programming in the early Eighties. "I taught myself coding on the ZX81 and wrote some 1K games, then I developed a string of games for the Spectrum, but as soon as I finished one and shared it with my friends I went straight on to the next. It wasn't until a friend suggested sending off some demo tapes that things moved from a hobby to a business."

Artic published Karl's *Mutant Monty* for the ZX Spectrum in 1984, *Mad Caverns* and *Rocket Man Mike* were published as listings in *Your Computer* magazine the following year. "After the Spectrum games I went to uni for a year to study computer science but found it boring and I missed games, so I dropped out when I was 19," says Karl, who then took his first steps to turning his hobby into a profession. "For the first few years I was working as 'Karl Jeffery T/A Images' as it was just me working alone as a ZX Spectrum programmer, and I later incorporated the company as Images Software Limited."

Karl set up an office in a flat above his dad's kitchen shop in Fareham, Hampshire. "It was more a hippy commune than a dev studio," he admits. "We had people sleeping on the floor and socialising together." Images quickly began picking up work via another local development team based in Southsea, Hampshire, called Catalyst Coders, run by David Wainwright.

"Catalyst had taken on several coin-op conversion contracts from Activision UK, but they were struggling to complete the projects," recalls Karl. To be able to complete the subcontracted work himself, Karl needed to attract more development talent, so he posted adverts in the local Job Centre, as Rob Hylands remembers. "I saw an advert for a programmer, and I got an interview. I took some of the stuff that I had been doing

GAMES TO DISCOVER

R-TYPE
ATARI ST, 1988
■ Not quite as smooth as the coin-op but just as playable, Image's conversion was our type of game.

FLYING SHARK
AMIGA, 1988
■ Considering the short development, Image's *Flying Shark* conversions were impressive.

WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND
AMIGA, 1989
■ This fun sequel is a gentle introduction to platform-style games.

BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II
COMMODORE 64, 1990
■ This version in particular looks good and offers decent value.

BEAST BUSTERS
ATARI ST, 1990
■ SNK's non-stop sideways-scrolling on-rails shooter was expertly converted by Images for 16-bit computers.

» [Atari ST] Images helped Catalyst by converting the arcade coin-op *Rampage* to the Atari ST.

» [Atari ST] This conversion of *R-Type* to Atari's 16-bit computer was officially Images' first published game.

» [Atari ST] *Flying Shark* saw Images fly in at the last moment to convert the Taito game to the 16-bits for Firebird.

at home on the Spectrum. Unfortunately, Karl was looking for someone to help out on an Atari ST game, but he was impressed enough to loan me an ST and send me away to see what I could do."

Rob learned as much as he could about 68000 programming and returned with a demo of multiple balls bouncing around against each other. Rob got the job and immediately started working with Karl on the Atari ST conversion of the Irem coin-op *R-Type* for Activision's publishing label, Electric Dreams. Rob later helped Catalyst programmer Bob Pape with the sound and music routines on the exceptional ZX Spectrum version. Images was soon called upon to perform a similar job for Activision via Catalyst on another coin-op conversion, the smash-'em-up arcade game *Rampage*, from Bally Midway. Karl once again contributed code to the Atari ST conversion.

> "Catalyst had taken on several coin-op conversion contracts from Activision UK, but they were struggling to complete the projects"
> **Karl Jeffery**

A graphic artist who also joined Images via a Job Centre advert was Andy Pang. "The Amiga bundle I had came with Electronic Arts' Deluxe Paint, and finally you could draw with a mouse rather than use a keyboard," remembers Andy. "I was hooked. My days were then spent pushing pixels until my brother Tom gave me a number he found at the Job Centre for a company making computer games. I was at college, but Tom knew it's what I wanted to do, so he called the number and passed me the phone. I landed an interview, so I brought my art along with a game I had made using the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* on the Commodore 64." Andy joined fellow artist Jason Lihou, and programmers Rob Brooks, Henry Clark, Rob Hylands and Karl at Images a week later, working part-time.

Catalyst Coders had signed a contract with BT to write home-computer conversions of the Taito arcade coin-op *Flying Shark*, but after a few months of little progress, the Spectrum and Amstrad conversions were cancelled by the publisher and reassigned to Graftgold. Firebird was on the brink of cancelling the 16-bit conversions completely, so David Wainwright asked if Karl could attend an emergency meeting in London at Firebird's New Oxford

CHIP'S CHALLENGE
COMMODORE 64, 1990
■ The Atari Lynx puzzle game worked extremely well on every format that Images converted it to.

NINJA SPIRIT
AMIGA, 1990
■ Small but perfectly formed sprites and nifty gameplay is the hallmark of this coin-op conversion.

SHADOW DANCER
AMIGA, 1991
■ Sega's follow-up to its earlier hit *Shinobi* was a mash-up of *Rolling Thunder* and *Ninja Warriors*.

SPACE GUN
ZX SPECTRUM, 1992
■ This on-rails shooter coin-op conversion played amazing well, even on the ZX Spectrum.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR
ATARI LYNX, UNRELEASED
■ A terrific technical achievement on Atari's handheld console, which stepped aside for the Jaguar version.

Street office. Karl went along and was faced with an angry publisher who Karl was able to reassure, promising to deliver Atari ST and Amiga conversions. "I was presented as the saviour of the project, but really I was really just winging it!" admits Karl several decades later. The Atari ST conversion was written by Henry Clark and Karl, followed by the Amiga version from the two Robs, Rob Hylands and Rob Brooks. Due to the incredibly tight schedule, the Amiga game was based upon the Atari ST code, with a few small changes. "I coded the scroll and sprites engine on the Atari," says Karl. "That version featured the very first full-screen hardware vertical scroll on the ST using a trick I found in the video hardware."

Images was given the arcade board from Taito to work from, but no documentation was forthcoming. "We played the game hundreds of times and videoed it using a camcorder," says Karl. "In hindsight we should have extracted code or graphics directly from the ROMs, but we just had to get on with the coding."

> "I was presented as the saviour of the project, but really I was really just winging it!
> **Karl Jeffery**

"*Flying Shark* was at the finishing stages when I joined," remembers Andy. "Working late one night after college, they needed a Firebird logo for the loading screen, Jason wasn't around, so I was asked. No credit, but what a rush!" *Flying Shark* on 16-bit was released just before Christmas 1988, but Images was already onto its next project. Converting the *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* coin-op for Activision meant a return to Z80 coding for Rob Hylands on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC conversions. It was also Andy Pang's first major contribution as a graphic artist. "Working mainly from home, I recreated the graphics using the Commodore 64 and then helped Jason to finish the graphics for the Amiga and ST using The Advanced Art Studio on the Atari," Andy says. "The Spectrum format was fairly simple, using the Atari ST assets and downgrading them to two colours per 8x8 character."

» [Amiga] *The Hunt For Red October* was based on the popular 1990 film starring Sean Connery and Alec Baldwin.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Wonder Boy* was an early conversion of Sega's hit coin-op that Images developed for Activision.

"Pretty soon the business took too much time for me to continue coding," remembers Karl. "So, from then on I focussed on project management."

Over at Mirrorsoft in South London, the Robert Maxwell-owned publisher was branching out into film licences. Through Dick Lehrberg Associates in Los Angeles, Mirrorsoft signed several upcoming movies, including *Back To The Future Part II* and *Part III*, which were ironically being filmed back to back in the States.

Former Activision project manager Stuart Hibbert was a recent recruit at Mirrorsoft, and he was immediately given the job of managing *Back To The Future Part II* after Images was signed. Referring to production photos supplied on 35mm slides and a draft of the script, Stuart and Karl quickly sketched out some ideas. What they came up with was a game split into five distinct sections. The first and last sections were based on the hover-board chase sequences from the film. One section was a simple horizontal scrolling beat-'em-up, one was an overhead logic puzzle, with the remaining

THE DNA OF IMAGES SOFTWARE
HOW THE DEVELOPER STOOD OUT

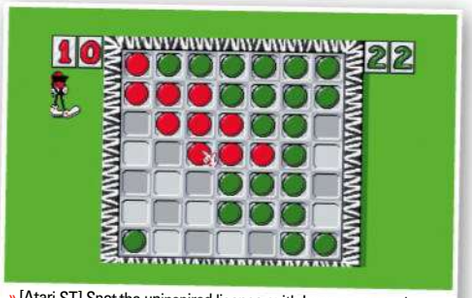
ADAPTING LICENCES
Images racked up a succession of coin-op conversions for various publishers. From the mid-Eighties onwards, coin-ops became the mainstay for many publishers. Images did briefly dabble in film licences as well, producing *Back To The Future Part II* and *The Hunt For Red October*, both released in 1990.

SPREADING THE LOAD
With so many companies falling by the wayside as the industry evolved, Images signed deals with over a dozen different publishers to avoid overly relying on any one company. Activision UK was the most prolific business relationship, as it was based in nearby Southampton.

» [Atari ST] *Back To The Future Part II* was not the most action-packed movie to base a game on.

» [Amiga] *Chip's Challenge* was a great game on all formats, from the Amiga to the ZX Spectrum.

» [Atari Lynx] Had it been finished, *Alien Vs Predator* on the Lynx would have surely been a huge hit.



» [Atari ST] Spot the uninspired licence, with Images converting this Othello-inspired game for Virgin Games.

level an animated sliding picture puzzle. Between them they offered enough variety whilst retaining thematic and visual links to the movie and its plot. Not only did it produce six computer versions of the game, but it also gave Images the chance to write for consoles as well, producing a Sega Master System version.

Images got to adapt another Hollywood blockbuster for home consumption that year, when it produced a game based upon *The Hunt For Red October* for Grandslam Entertainment. Following a similar design pattern, it split the game into five sections, and repeated one section twice, a sideways-scrolling underwater shoot-'em-up mixed in with much shorter stages. "By then, I'd set up another dev team in Wakefield, Yorkshire called Audio Visual Magic Limited (AVM) and they did some of the work on *The Hunt For Red October*, although that was still mainly developed by Images in Fareham," says Karl.

1990 proved to be an incredibly hectic year. Another challenging coin-op conversion for Activision was *Beast Busters*, from SNK. This sideways-scrolling on-rails shooter was a non-stop blaster from start to finish, with Images producing very commendable 16-bit versions. Irem's sideways-scrolling beat-'em-up coin-op

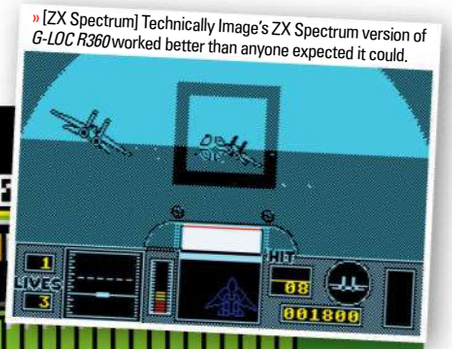
CONVERSION WORK

Images often took on conversion work of existing titles, including the 7-Up-licensed *Spot: The Video Game* for Virgin, the handheld Atari Lynx title *Chip's Challenge* for US Gold, and the Amiga RPG and hack-'em-up, *Moonstone: A Hard Day's Knight* for Mindscape International.

MISSING LYNX

Unfortunately, producing games for the Atari Lynx proved unfruitful for Images. Both *Alien Vs Predator*, and *Road Riot 4WD* looked technically superb on Atari's impressive handheld, but neither game made it through to completion and release when Atari switched attention to its new Jaguar console.

» [Atari ST] *Beast Busters* was a fast-paced lightgun game that Images converted to the 16-bits.

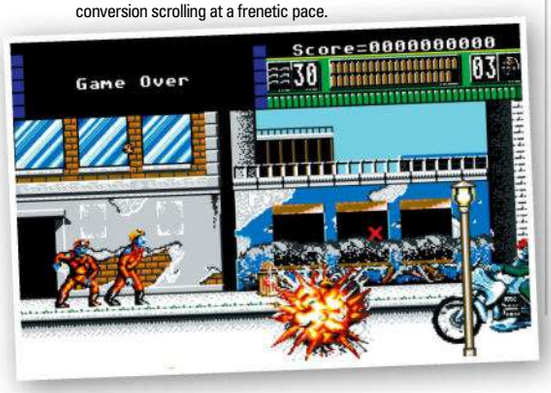


» [ZX Spectrum] Technically Image's ZX Spectrum version of *G-LOC R360* worked better than anyone expected it could.

Ninja Spirit was also converted to the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga for Activision.

The debut of the Atari Lynx handheld in 1989 gave Images the chance to convert the launch title *Chip's Challenge* to all the major home-computer formats for US Gold. It was a game that worked as well on the ZX Spectrum as it did on the Atari ST or Commodore Amiga, thanks in part to its tile-based design. Images also worked on a Nintendo Entertainment System conversion.

» [Atari ST] Explosive action kept Images' *Beast Busters* Atari ST conversion scrolling at a frenetic pace.



Coded by James Smart, and with graphics by Steve Bedser, the NES version was never completed or released. "I really wish *Chip's Challenge* had gone ahead on the NES, as that would have got us solidly into Nintendo consoles much earlier," says Karl. The conversion was written for Bulletproof Software, but the cost of manufacturing the required cartridge proved too much to justify the upfront financial outlay that Nintendo required from the publisher, so the NES version was dropped.

The next couple of years were chock-a-block with more coin-op conversions. A Commodore 64 conversion of Sega's Mega Drive scrolling beat-'em-up *Last Battle* for Elite, various versions of Sega's *Shinobi* sequel *Shadow Dancer* for US Gold, the flight combat coin-op *G-LOC* R360 again for US Gold, and Taito's *Space Gun* for Ocean, another on-rails shooter for all formats.

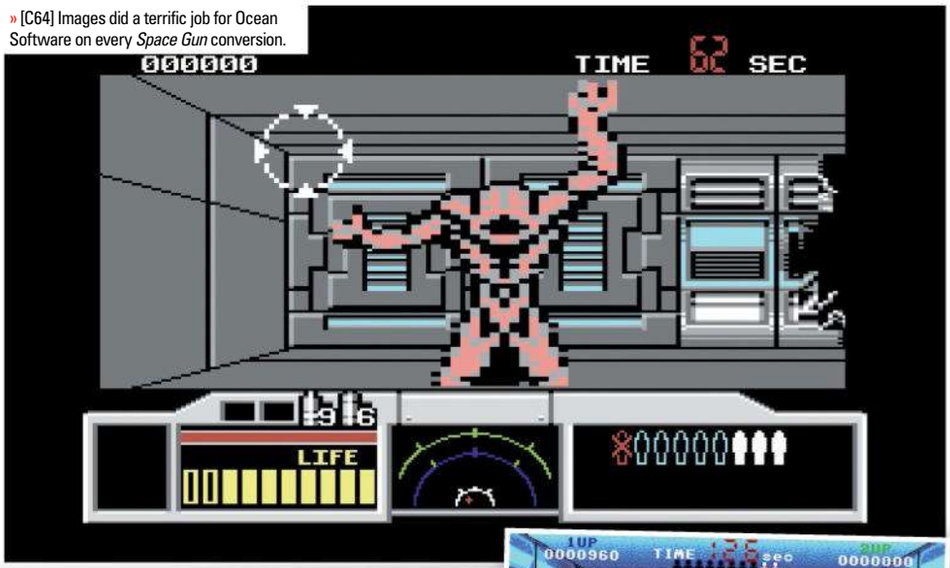
Mindscape International called on Images to convert the Amiga RPG and hack-'em-up title *Moonstone: A Hard Day's Knight* to the IBM PC, a platform which was slowly but surely starting to become more prominent, as was the Sega Master System, especially in Europe.

> "I really wish Chip's Challenge had gone ahead on the NES, as that would have got us solidly into Nintendo consoles much earlier
> **Karl Jeffery**

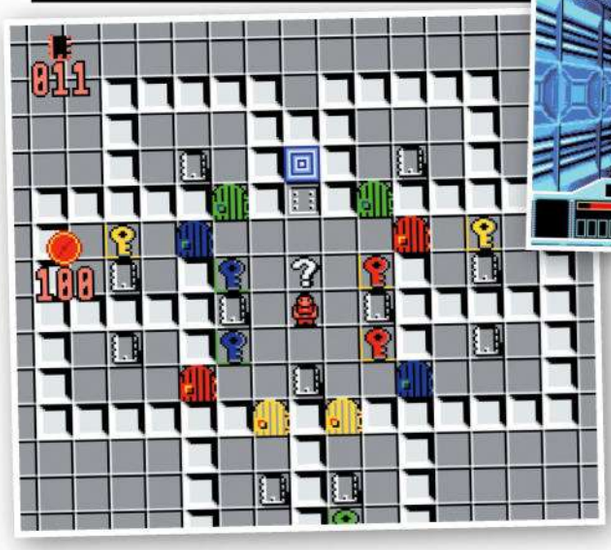
A simple collection of early coin-op games called *Arcade Smash Hits* was produced for that console, published by Virgin Games.

Images relationship with Epyx and with Activision led to development of the *Alien Vs Predator* first-person action game for the Atari Lynx. Using the ability to connect different Lynx handhelds together via ComLynx, players could play against each other as a marine, a Predator or an Alien. Images also produced a conversion of the Tengen coin-op *Road Riot 4WD* for the Atari handheld, but neither game was finished or released.

"I can't recall why the Lynx games never went ahead," admits Karl. It was likely that the Lynx was no longer as important to Atari come the mid-Nineties. It had the new Jaguar console to focus on, and the idea of a game based upon *Alien Vs* Predator therefore moved

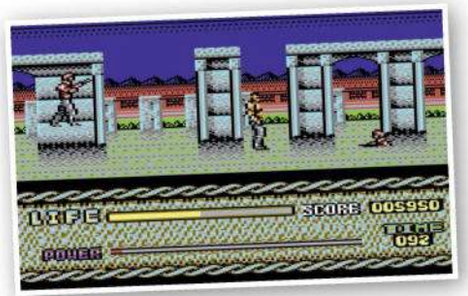


» [C64] Images did a terrific job for Ocean Software on every *Space Gun* conversion.



» [NES] The unreleased NES version of *Chip's Challenge* featured a bigger view, making some levels easier to solve.

» [Master System] *Arcade Smash Hits* for Virgin Games included the Atari classics *Breakout*, *Centipede* and *Missile Command*.



» [C64] Images converted a number of Sega games to home computers, including *Last Battle*.

onto the newer hardware and a new developer, with the Lynx projects pushed aside.

Images did get into Nintendo development in the end, thanks to conversions of Accolade's *Bubsy II* to the Nintendo Game Boy, but its Sega Game Gear port was another handheld casualty, failing to get a release.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

WHAT IMAGES SOFTWARE MEMBERS DID NEXT

KARL JEFFERY

Karl was managing director and chief executive officer of the Climax Group until 2007, and he then became chairman of Climax Studios and Hyperion Ventures Limited. Karl also became founder and chief executive officer of Arooga a few years later. He remains a serial games and internet entrepreneur, and is extremely passionate about the power of innovation and entrepreneurship.

ROB HYLANDS

After leaving Images Software, Rob remained a games programmer until 2004, when he decided to leave the industry completely and returned to his hometown to run a local pub. Whilst performing the duties of a landlord, Rob became interested and active in local politics and became a local councillor. He continues to perform both roles to this day.

ANDY PANG

After many years working for Images and then Climax, Andy moved to Argonaut in London, then Illusion Softworks in the Czech Republic. Once Illusion was successfully bought by 2K, Andy left to set up a Czech studio called Vatra Games and when Kuju bought them, he returned to the UK, and bought a 12-bedroom guest house in Portsmouth.

By the mid-Nineties, Karl felt it was time to reinvent his development company and prepare it for the new challenges that lay ahead. "When the PlayStation was announced, it coincided with the shift from 2D games to 3D, which was a big change. I had also felt for some time that the name Images Software was too generic. In the early days there were lots of companies using common words like digital, data, image, soft, games and so on. If we were to grow, we needed to stand out. After a few beers we kicked around some name ideas and finally decided on Climax because it was a bit cheeky, hard to forget but also a synonym for reaching the pinnacle or the top."

Rob Hylands left for pastures new before the change to Climax, but his recollections of working for Karl at Images remain strong and positive. "My standout memories revolve around the people. They were an interesting bunch. We often had conversations after work about where computers and computer games were heading. I also remember the hard work, the late hours and the sheer ingenuity of the people writing games originally designed to run on more powerful arcade machines."

Andy Pang remained until the turn of the new century, and then he also moved on, but like Rob, his memories are good ones. "I love the game industry and my experience at Images Software was a special time for me. It's full of interesting people, ever-evolving technology, standards, variety and challenges."

Images transformed into Climax in 1995, and the shift to bigger, more expensive development on the next generation of consoles helped Karl and his refreshed company reach new heights of success. The story of Images Software might have ended, but the story of Climax had only just begun.

ULTIMATEDESTROYER
BLASTWIND
ULTIMATEDESTROYER
BLASTWIND
ULTIMATEDESTROYER
BLASTWIND
ULTIMATEDESTROYER
BLASTWIND
2P
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X2

Blast Wind

BUY GAMES WHEN YOU'RE SOBER

» RETROREVIVAL

» SATURN » 1997 » TECHNOSOFT

I always regretted passing on *Blast Wind* when I first had the opportunity to buy it. This was around 2003/2004 when I'd first purchased my This Is Cool Saturn and around 28 shmups for £500 off shmups.com. A local importer had been asking £70 for it and it simply felt too much after I'd just purchased 28 or so shmups for roughly £17 each.

Fast forward to 2015 and I've woken up with a hangover and a notification that just under £500 had left my account. An evening of beer and feeling sorry for myself had led to a foolish purchase of not only *Blast Wind*, but *Kyukyoku Tiger II Plus*, a game that I'd once owned (it was part of that £500 collection) but had long sold off to fund my first professional camera lens.

As it turns out, while *Blast Wind* certainly isn't worth what I paid for it, it's actually a very entertaining blaster and I've found myself returning to it often over the last few years. It is easy to see why so many passed over it on release though as it's not a Technosoft game that impresses in the way *Thunder Force V* or *Hyper Duel* does. For a start it has rather chunky visuals that almost make it look like a high-end Mega Drive game at times. Then there's the low number of power-ups and the rather simple scoring system.

It controls well enough and the ability to find new routes through a stage by pushing switches is a nice touch, as is gaining a brief moment of invulnerability whenever you grab a power-up, but it feels quite pedestrian compared to other Technosoft shmups and simply doesn't have that wow factor. What it does have though is some genuinely challenging attack waves, decent bosses and a truly exceptional soundtrack. Just don't buy it after consuming several bottles of Budweiser, you may end up regretting it.

THE EVOLUTION OF The Cruis'n Series

INSPIRED BY THE JOY OF PLAYING OUT RUN, EUGENE JARVIS CREATED ONE OF THE FIRST SHADED VECTOR RACERS WITH CRUIS'N USA. EUGENE EXPLAINS HOW HIS ARCADE HIT INSPIRED A SERIES THAT TOOK THE CONCEPT OF FUN DRIVING TO OUTRAGEOUS NEW LEVELS

Words By Rory Milne

» [Arcade] You progress in *Cruis'n USA* by finishing first, but there are also countdowns and checkpoints.

» [Arcade] The head-on collisions in *Cruis'n USA* flip you into the air and then back into the race.

Sega's arcade racer *Out Run* redefined the genre with its impossibly colourful depiction of speeding along the open road and the unbridled joy it gave players. Yu Suzuki's hit employed 2D sprite scaling to achieve its 3D effect, but a few years later, 3D shaded vector graphics became possible, and designer Eugene Jarvis saw an opportunity to build on the coin-op's basic concept while adding cutting-edge visuals. "*Out Run* was a big deal, so I wanted to capture some of that," Eugene remembers. "The cool thing was the spirit of just having fun and going out for a drive. It wasn't like a hardcore race. So my idea was to have a really good 3D simulation that was responsive to the driver, and by using 3D texture mapping we could have realistic digitised backgrounds."

Like *Out Run*, Eugene's project began as one road trip but was changed to another, but where *Out Run* was relocated to Europe, Eugene expanded his initial remit to the wider USA. "Originally we were going to do *Cruis'n Route 66*, but we decided that we wanted a broader theme of cruising the States," Eugene notes. "It was kind of a free licence. We could put Hollywood in there, and The White House and the Golden Gate Bridge. Then we could have virtual tourism, with the passenger saying things like, 'LA is so cool!'"

With a premise of touring the States in place, *Cruis'n USA* was a natural title for Eugene's work in progress, and since it was a road race he ruled out looped courses. "It was a road-touring game, so it wouldn't have made sense to have circuits," Eugene points out. "So we made it point to point, and instead of screwing the player by having tracks that were impossible to drive like *Hard Drivin'*, we wanted something more forgiving, but still with a challenge. We wanted everyday driving with oncoming traffic."

In order to make overtaking more about skill than luck, Eugene reused a proven concept to help players make informed decisions on when to pass their competitors. "To win, you really had to cut the corners and go over the hills without knowing what the hell was over there," Eugene reflects. "So I added a little *Defender*-esque scanner, so you could tell if there was somebody coming around the corner. Although you could just go for it, which added this really neat white-knuckle feel!"

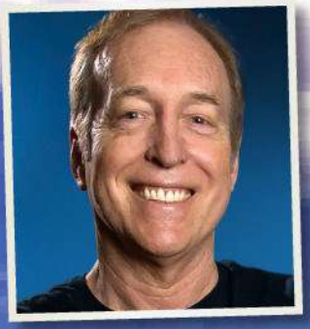
> "ORIGINALLY WE WERE GOING TO DO CRUIS'N ROUTE 66"
>
> Eugene Jarvis

In a further concession to difficulty, Eugene worked out a balance for *Cruis'n USA*'s AI drivers that would let players catch up with them but not easily overtake them. "I wanted to give players the feeling that there was always hope," Eugene reasons. "So there was a very forgiving rubber band that would help you quite a bit to catch up. But you still had to pass the cars in front, and the closer you got the less rubber band you had. I liked that you had to earn the win, so what I did was make them corner better than you. It was still fun, though, because you had the speed to pass them on the straights."

More fun followed thanks to a quirk in an algorithm that Eugene decided to keep, which made the behaviour of *Cruis'n USA*'s AI racers somewhat less predictable. "Up until that point the drone cars in racing games went at a constant speed, doing their thing," Eugene recalls, "but our drone cars actually overtook other cars and did all kinds of crazy stuff. Every now and then the pack would just explode, and it became almost like a demolition derby for a few seconds!"

By comparison, *Cruis'n USA*'s oncoming traffic was far more safety conscious. But players were bound to collide with it, and Eugene didn't want overly harsh sanctions. "There were some really severe head-on crashes, but we wanted to get the player back on the road quickly," Eugene qualifies. "So we had their car do these miraculous flips, and then land right back on their wheels! They were penalised, but only by maybe a couple of seconds. It wasn't anything super severe."

A decision made late in development differentiated *Cruis'n USA* further from other racers, in that its linear level progression was dropped in favour of a flat structure. "Most driving games had you start at the same



» Director of the *Cruis'n* series Eugene Jarvis runs his own development studio Raw Thrills.

» [Arcade] *Cruis'n World*'s off-road vehicles are a series first and a good choice for its Australian course.

» [Arcade] Eugene Jarvis didn't want overly challenging tracks in *Cruis'n USA* like those in *Hard Drivin'*.

[Arcade] Some artistic licence is taken with *Cruis'n World*'s locations, its Stonehenge track has UFOs!

[Arcade] The joy of driving fast on the open road in *Out Run* was a major influence on *Cruis'n USA*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
Superb Settings
ECLECTIC LOCATIONS OF THE CRUIS'N SERIES

San Francisco

The opening tracks of *Cruis'n USA*'s road trip across the States include a run over the Golden Gate Bridge and a drive through the streets of San Francisco. After squeezing through narrow avenues, you fly over the city's famously steep hills at speeds you'd never attempt in real life.

Japan

Don't let its idyllic Far East setting distract you, *Cruis'n World*'s Japanese course requires your full attention. Like a plate of spaghetti, the track twists and turns its way up and down treacherous ascents and descents. All of which makes drifting essential for quick course times.

London

Set in a version of the capital that's like a technicolor daydream, *Cruis'n Blast*'s trip to London takes in all the famous landmarks despite being no bigger than a square mile! Further craziness includes racing across the top of trains and avoiding the London Eye as it rolls down the street.

» [N64] Anything goes in *Cruis'n Exotica*, it even takes you back in time to an Amazon with dinosaurs.

spot," Eugene observes. "That was the original idea for *Cruis'n USA* too. You would start in San Francisco and drive over to Washington DC. But after playtesting it for a few weeks I got tired of just driving in San Francisco! So I thought why not let players go anywhere they wanted?"

The open nature of *Cruis'n USA* and its focus on fun proved to be highly popular. So naturally, a sequel followed, but Eugene didn't just want to make *Cruis'n USA 2*. "We thought about setting it in places around the States that hadn't appeared in the first game," Eugene concedes, "but we figured that there was a need for novelty. So this was *the world!* It meant we could have the Pyramids Of Egypt, and Japan and London. We sent the artists on planes around the globe to all of these places. We were always maybe a year behind schedule, but we certainly had fun!"

The fun had by those making the sequel fed through to its gameplay, with *Cruis'n*

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

Awesome Automobiles

THE CRUIS'N CARS YOU SHOULD TAKE FOR A SPIN

Italia P69

Don't let its generic name fool you, *Cruis'n USA*'s Italia P69 is a dead ringer for *Out Run*'s Ferrari Testarossa. Like its inspiration, the Italia has a decent top speed, but it suffers from sluggish acceleration. In terms of handling, it takes corners at pace without too much skidding.

Corvette Invader

There are faster cars in *Cruis'n Exotica* than the Invader, and they have it beat in terms of aerodynamics too. The Invader obviously doesn't corner as well as the game's heavier vehicles either. Nevertheless, it hits a sweet spot, in so much as it has solid stats across the board.

Nissan 350Z

The car you drive in *Cruis'n* is secondary to the *way* that you drive it. Boosting and car vaulting is just *that* important to winning races. That said, you need something with decent handling and cornering for when you're not speeding along the straights, and the Nissan 350Z fits the bill.

» [N64] *Cruis'n Exotica* was converted to the N64, like *Cruis'n USA* and *Cruis'N World* before it.

» [GBA] The Game Boy Advance title *Cruis'n Velocity* takes you to unexpected locales such as rural Ireland.

World's most notable innovation being the stunts that players could do while racing. "We *really* developed the stunts," Eugene enthuses. "Like when you double-pumped the accelerator you did a wheelie, and if you did that you could jump over the car in front of you! So the stunts were fun features, but they were functional too, because doing them reduced your lap time, which helped to give you a high score."

> "WE HAD THIS ELEPHANT THAT WOULD SHIT ON YOUR WINDSHIELD! YOU COULD ALSO DRIVE INTO GIRAFFES AND REDUCE THEM TO CHUNKS OF MEAT!"
> Eugene Jarvis

Another of the follow-up's novel features challenged players to race on rough surfaces instead of on tarmac, which suited some of its vehicles more than others. "We had some off-road vehicles," Eugene recollects. "Those were good, because you could drive them strategically. If you had a dirt track with a lot of tight corners then you would go with a more off-road vehicle that could drive on the dirt without a penalty. So we were introducing some strategy there."

However, the most obvious new element in *Cruis'n World*, its speed boost, was actually just for show. But of course showing off was all part of the game's fun. "You know, it's funny. Boosting didn't increase your speed at all," Eugene admits. "But it was so much fun that people did it all the time. You would shoot out from the camera, and you would *think* you were having this tremendous boost, but it actually didn't do anything!" Nevertheless, *Cruis'n World*'s novel additions led to demand for another *Cruis'n* title. For the third game, Eugene went off the beaten track, and massively ramped up the humour. "We wanted to have impossible places like Atlantis, Mars and the Amazon – but with dinosaurs!" Eugene grins. "I remember we had an Indian track with this elephant that would shit on your windshield! You could also drive into giraffes on the African course and reduce them to chunks of meat!"

Additional comedy was squeezed into *Cruis'n Exotica* wherever possible. This included amusing big-headed player characters, and the US president launching into orbit. "We were just trying to come up with the craziest of the crazy!" Eugene exclaims. "It was trying to get a laugh out of the room, so we did the most extreme crap ever. We even had Bill Clinton in his hot tub and the whole White House in space!"

In terms of gameplay-related craziness, *Cruis'n Exotica*'s shortcuts were given super-steep hills, designed to rocket players back onto the main track from a great height. "It was because we loved the big air!" Eugene quips. "In *Cruis'n World*, there was a Hawaii track, and there was this great shortcut. If there was a sign that said Road Closed then that meant that it was a shortcut. But in *Exotica* we had many more, and with the jumps they kind of became a new thing."

The release of *Cruis'n Exotica* was bittersweet, however, as it arrived as many arcades were closing. So when the series continued, it did so on the Game Boy Advance. "I thought *Cruis'n Velocity* was cool, and it sold well," Eugene reviews. "It was pretty fascinating that the developer was able to pull that off, and it was incredible that it was based on a *Doom*-type engine. It goes without saying that it wasn't as good as the coin-ops, but for the system it was running on it was really impressive."

Eugene later produced a coin-op based on *The Fast And The Furious*, which was ported ▶

▲ [Arcade] *The Fast And The Furious* coin-op was Eugene Jarvis's spiritual successor to the *Cruis'n* games.

» [Switch] Next-level leaping that's more akin to flying is a big part of *Cruis'n Blast*'s appeal.

▶ to the Wii as *Cruis'n*. One of the games' core concepts was earning cash to fund upgrades. "The in-game money was a cool thing that added a little more depth," Eugene considers. "As you racked up the mileage, and earned money, you could get upgrades for your cars and unlock secret vehicles. There were maybe eight categories of upgrades, and five levels for each. You could play those games for your lifetime probably, just building up your cars and stuff."

But cash rewards for racing were far from the games' only perks. As pulling off stunts, speedy lap times and keeping your car in the air were all recognised. "We wanted to have different rewards, so it wasn't all down to making money," Eugene contemplates. "We wanted to give players bragging rights, so we had high-score tables for everything: for every track time, for the air-time, and for the stunts."

Following the release of *Cruis'n*, the series appeared to have come to an end. But then Eugene became convinced that a reboot would make a successful arcade title. "It had been 17 years since the previous coin-op *Cruis'n Exotica*. That was a long hiatus," Eugene muses. "People were telling me that nobody would remember that crap! But the crazy thing is that the original *Cruis'n* players now had their own kids, and I thought it might be really cool to bring parents and kids together in an arcade environment."

The end result – *Cruis'n Blast* – took full advantage of modern tech. And as well as stunning visuals, this also allowed it to deliver the most insane *Cruis'n* experience yet. "I remember on the London track you could jump onto the roof of the trains!" Eugene beams. "It was like something out of a *James Bond* movie. Then the London Eye would just roll down the street! We also revisited the meat chunks, and had a herd of cattle walking across the street out in Texas or wherever the hell it was."

> "WHEN THE PANDEMIC CAME AROUND WE WERE THINKING HOW WE WOULD MEET OUR PAYROLL, AND WE DECIDED TO DO CRUIS'N BLAST FOR THE SWITCH"
> Eugene Jarvis

Aside from referencing the humour of the earlier games, *Cruis'n Blast* also channelled their disregard for careful driving, while giving players more control over their vehicles. "There was just ridiculous air-time, and we put a little air-steering in there. There were also some really cool tricks that you could do," Eugene explains. "The handling in the game was so precise, the guys really nailed that – the drifting and everything. So I was really pleased with *Cruis'n Blast* on a personal level, and for Raw Thrills it turned out to be its best-selling arcade game."

After three years of *Cruis'n Blast* collecting coins, COVID-19 brought the world to a halt. So in 2021, Eugene brought an enhanced version of the game into players' homes. "When the pandemic came around we were thinking how we would meet our payroll, and we decided to do *Cruis'n Blast* for the Switch," Eugene thinks back. "Adapting it for the home player meant that we had to add a tremendous amount of depth, so you had to race to get different cars, and collect cash and keys. There was also just an insane amount of upgrades."

In addition to keeping Eugene's company afloat during the Coronavirus years, the popularity of the Switch *Cruis'n* title has implications for the original. More specifically, he plans to reimagine it for console gamers, who he feels certain will want to cruise the USA. "I have a *Cruis'n USA* coin-op in my basement, and I love that game," Eugene says smiling. "I guess I'm biased, but it seems like there's just a magic there. With the drones, the tracks and all of the crazy stuff it's kind of a white-knuckle ride! So I'd definitely like to bring something back with *Cruis'n USA*; 30 years later it's time to take another look at it. I've toyed with bringing it back on the Switch. That could be really fun to do." ✱

» [Wii] Due to licensing issues, *The Fast And The Furious* became *Cruis'n* when it was converted to the Wii.

» [Switch] *Cruis'n Blast* offers four-player local play, just like the earlier N64 games did.

» [Switch] As well as earning money for racing in *Cruis'n Blast*, you can also collect cash on its courses.

Oversized *Cruis'n World* images courtesy of mobygames.com

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

Fun Features

NOVEL ASPECTS OF THE CRUIS'N GAMES

Sublime Stunts

Cruis'n USA's stunts are limited to launching off hills and aerial flips following collisions. Stunts really become an option in *Cruis'n World*, where you have boosts, wheelies and two-wheelers. Then *Cruis'n Blast* takes things to another level, with crazy ramps and mid-air acrobatics.

Demented Drivers

The third of the original *Cruis'n* coin-ops takes the surreal humour of the previous titles and runs with it. Before you start the first race you get to choose a driver, and some are generic. But then you see the other candidates: which include a big-headed clown, a Martian and Mr T!

Cool Collectables

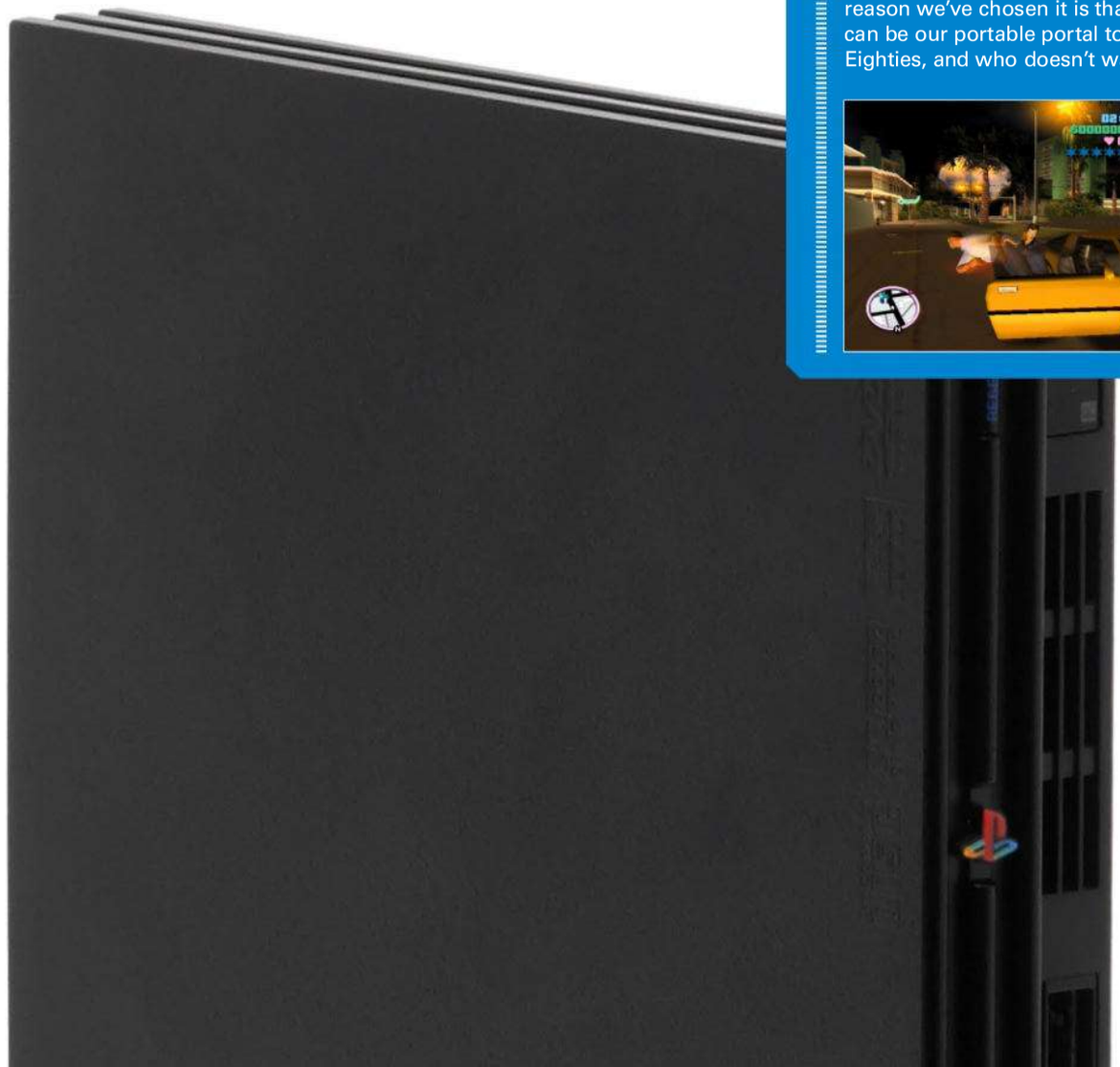
An interesting sidequest in *Cruis'n Blast* is a treasure hunt for keys that are found scattered around the game's courses – three per track. As well as using them to unlock vehicles, you can additionally use the keys in lieu of cash to purchase those vehicles once they become available.

PlayStation 2 (SCPH-70000 Series)

» **MANUFACTURER:** Sony » **YEAR:** 2004
» **COST:** £99.99 (launch), £55+ (today, boxed), £25+ (today, unboxed)

Sony has historically proven to be quite proactive in producing smaller, lighter and ultimately cheaper versions of its consoles, and its most popular machine was no exception. Announced four-and-a-half years into the life of the platform, the SCPH-70000 model boasts significant size and noise advantages over the older models of the console, as well as a built-in Ethernet port for online gaming. The overall look of the system is very similar to that of the original model, retaining the shape and ridged front. The primary difference in operation is the use of a flip-top lid for the disc drive, rather than a front-loading tray.

One thing Sony declined to change was the name of the console, as it was still officially known simply as the PlayStation 2. Players typically refer to it as the PS2 slim or less commonly the PStwo, after its older sibling, the PSone. This new model proved very popular, though it did have one major teething issue as Sony had to recall power supplies for the console in 2005 due to fire safety concerns.



ESSENTIAL GAME

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

The big advantage of the PS2 slim is that it's so small that you can easily chuck it in a bag and take it anywhere. With the right piece of software, that opens up some wild possibilities – and for us, that's Rockstar's crime caper. *GTA III* was great, but *Vice City* improved on it with larger environments, better vehicles and storyline. But the main reason we've chosen it is that it can be our portable portal to the Eighties, and who doesn't want that?

PlayStation 2 (SCPH-70000 Series) fact

■ An RJ-11 phone jack port was also included on North American models of the console, as Sony reported that 40% of players were still playing online games via dial-up.

PROCESSOR: MIPS III R5900-BASED 64-BIT EMOTION ENGINE CPU (295MHZ)

GRAPHICS: GRAPHICS SYNTHESIZER (147.5MHZ), 16 MILLION POLYGONS PER SECOND (WITH Z BUFFER, ALPHA, TEXTURE MAPPING AND FOG)

STORAGE: 32MB MAIN MEMORY, 4MB VIDEO MEMORY, 2MB AUDIO MEMORY, 2MB I/O MEMORY

MEDIA: CD-ROM (UP TO 650MB), DVD-ROM (UP TO 8.5GB)

NETWORK: ETHERNET, RJ-11 MODEM (ON US MODELS ONLY)

AUDIO: 2X SPU, 48 CHANNEL ADPCM PLUS SOFTWARE-MIXED DEFINABLE, PROGRAMMABLE CHANNELS

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY: SONY PLAYSTATION

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ALISTAIR CROOKS

Back in 1973, two plucky Brits decided to bring these new-fangled coin-operated videogames to our shores. Alistair Crooks shares the brief but fascinating story of Atari UK

Words by Paul Drury

Let's take you back exactly 50 years, Alistair, to May 1973 and the night you installed the first official Atari *Pong* machine in the UK.
I think it was a Friday. We put the machine in the Strathdon Hotel in Nottingham about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I lived in Castle Donington, 15 miles away, so I drove home and didn't think any more of it. The phone rang at 7.30pm that night and the manager said our machine had packed up. I thought, "Bloody hell, I've got no technical expertise," but I drove back to the hotel and took the back off the machine. The cashbox was jammed full of 10p pieces!

Several years ago, we were interviewing Al Alcorn, Atari's first engineer and creator of *Pong*, for a **Retro Gamer** article. He casually mentioned he had visited Nottingham during the company's early years, because that was where the first official *Pong* machine in the UK had been installed. Your correspondent, a Nottingham resident, was of course intrigued and Al kindly introduced us to Alistair Crooks, one of the two key figures behind Atari UK. Alistair, who has lived in Canada since retiring in 2003, was delighted to talk us through this largely unknown chapter in our island's gaming history. The campaign to have a blue plaque put up on the Strathdon Hotel starts here.

Result! Any idea how much money the machine had taken?
It wasn't a big cash box but I bet there were a hundred coins in there. Al [Alcorn, creator of *Pong*] told me the exact same thing happened when they first put a *Pong* machine in Andy Capp's Tavern [in Sunnyvale, California]. I sat there for the rest of the night, supping a beer, watching people play the machine and thought, "They're putting money right into my pocket" [laughs]. I was euphoric!

What kind of people were playing *Pong*?
It really was a cross-section, from teenagers to people in their 40s. It was easy to play and people were curious. Everyone wanted to try this new thing. And you have to know, we changed the name to *Ping*. I mean, we couldn't call it *Pong*, because of the meaning of the word in England!

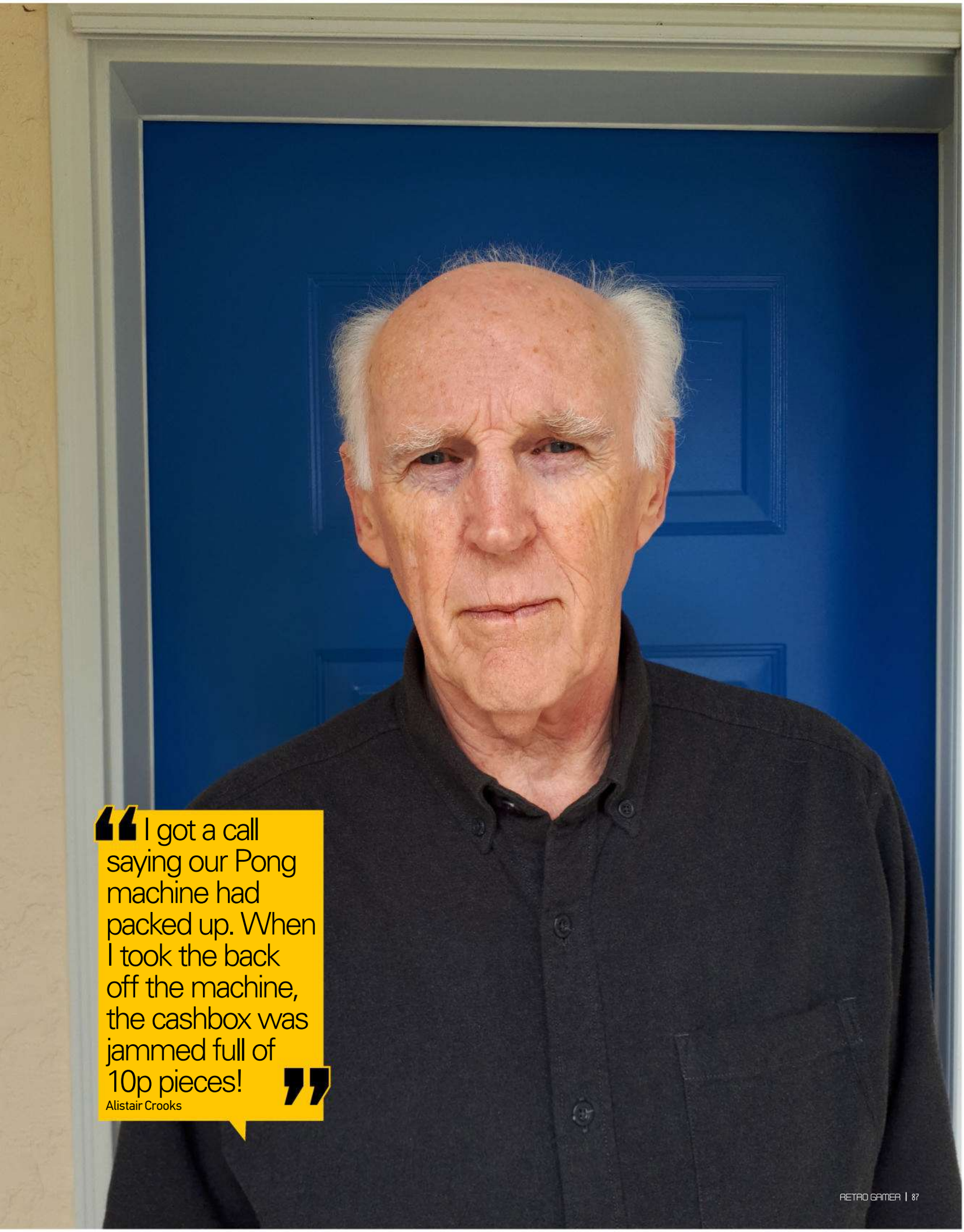
After that night, you clearly smelt an opportunity. Did you import more machines?
We'd flown in a few samples in late-May 1973 for photographic purposes, before we brought in an order of 100 machines in June.

Atari was selling *Pong* machines in the US for around $1,000 each, so that's some serious money…
It was and the person who must take credit for all of this is Phil Smith. He had had a successful career in haulage and made a lot of money. He had retired and was a keen golfer and would play in tournaments, often with Dai Rees, who was a famous golfer back then. In the first week of January 1973, they played at Pebble Beach [in California] and went up to Monterey, which was nearby. That's where Phil saw a *Pong* machine and it obviously made an impression on him.

How did you fit in, Alistair?
I knew Phil because he drank in the same pub as me, The Bull's Head in Breaston [in Derbyshire, England], and was often putting the world to rights in the bar. I met him when he came back later that month and remember him going on about this machine. I hadn't a clue what he was talking about. He said, "Look, I think these people at Atari are really going to crack it. I want to find out more about them. Would you help me?"

You had some background in the coin-op business, then?
No, I was a divisional sales manager at Kellogg's, as in the cornflakes people [laughs]. I wanted to work for myself, though, so I said I was interested, plus Phil said some flattering things about me, that he "liked the cut of my jib". Bullshit, but anyway.

So you got in touch with Atari to arrange a visit?
We thought they were Japanese because of the name! I contacted the Japanese trade delegation and got nowhere, obviously. Then Phil said he knew the trumpeter who played in the band at the club in Monterey where he'd seen the *Pong* machine! I even remember his name – Gary. Gary told us the machine was made just up the road from him in Los



> I got a call saying our Pong machine had packed up. When I took the back off the machine, the cashbox was jammed full of 10p pieces!
>
> Alistair Crooks

AN INTERVIEW WITH AL ALCORN

Atari's first engineer remembers bringing Pong to England

Can you recall when you first met Alistair?

He and his business partner [Phil Smith] came to visit Atari in the very early days when we were in a small office in Santa Clara. They were one of the first people to really see the potential of *Pong* and start a company to manufacture, sell and distribute the machines in England. In those days it was far more difficult to start up a company in England than America. If you hired employees it was very difficult to fire them so if things didn't go well, it could be very difficult to shut things down.

Were you very involved with Atari UK?

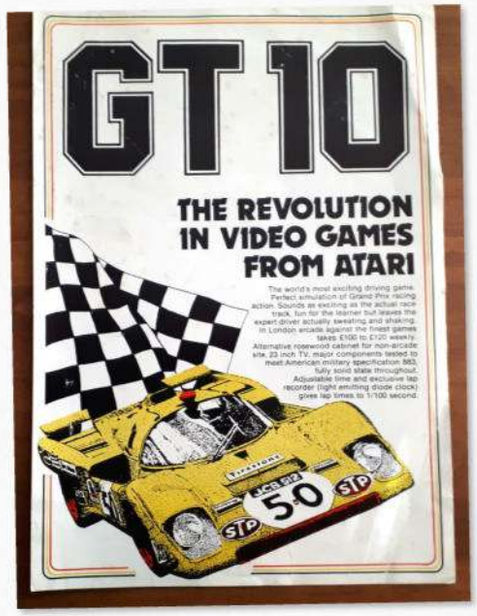
I was totally engrossed in engineering and tended to stay out of the sales and distribution side. I did come over to Europe a few months after that initial meeting [with Alistair and Phil] to visit several of our new European customers and help them with building *Pong* in their country. I visited Alistair a few more times after that and we became lifelong friends.

Alistair mentioned a football game Atari was working on back in the early Seventies…

I do know something about that! Many of our overseas customers wanted us to produce a football/soccer game so one was designed, based on customer input, and prototypes were made. They were terrible! It was the last time we let our customers design our games for us.

How did you feel when Atari UK went bust?

I was disappointed when the company failed, but by that time my focus had shifted to creating the home version of *Pong*. Alistair and I remain friends to this day, though.



» The striking flyer for Atari UK's unreleased *GT10*, featuring the fancy Ferrari owned by billionaire boss of JCB, Sir Anthony Bamford.

» A huge fan of motorsport, Alistair wrote all the text for the *GT10* flyer and posed for the photo too.

Gatos. Phil said, "You got any holiday due? I'll pay all your expenses if you come with me. Two heads are better than one!"

An offer you couldn't refuse.
We flew over and met Nolan Bushnell and this sales guy, who wore this really loud, check suit, and they took us to this steak bar, The Happy Hunter, and that's where the deal was done, all in a few hours. Phil put up an 'irrevocable letter of credit' for £100,000. That was a lot of money in 1973 but he was that confident.

What was Nolan like?
He was just a regular guy. I was from the UK where we wore suits and ties and what impressed me about him was that as we were walking through the Atari factory, the production workers were saying, "Hi Nolan." It was that casual. Nolan never even asked us if we had any experience.

We suppose back then, no one had much experience in videogames.
True, but we weren't even in the amusement arcade business. Phil came from haulage and I came from groceries. I've stayed friends with Al [Alcorn] and he told me that Atari was only four months in front of us, business-wise, so when two Europeans turned up, they were quite impressed. We were first in the door. Phil stayed over there for longer and I came back to England and handed in my notice at Kellogg's.

Wow, you were all in!
Oh yes. I was 31 years old and Phil would be about 60. He had been in bomber command in World War II. He'd actually been shot down and had been a prisoner of war. He was a pretty colourful character [laughs]. We formed Atari UK and Phil gave me a 10% stake in the company. I organised a warehouse, an office, set up the distribution network and did the marketing and advertising. We used a trade magazine called *World's Fair*, which is actually still going! We advertised extensively in there.

You said your first order was for 100 *Pong* machines. Were they easy to sell to distributors and operators here in the UK?
Oh yes, and we got a good mark-up, too. We could see the potential but it took six weeks to ship machines over from the States and it was very expensive. We realised we were paying for space as we knew the cabinets were two-thirds empty so it seemed logical to fly in the logic boards and make the actual cabinets here in the UK. By that autumn, September or October, we had set up a factory on Trent Lane in Castle Donington.

You have gone from an importer to a manufacturer in less than three months! Was that a difficult transition?
Oh, it was a nightmare. I had great reservations about it because I had no experience of manufacturing but Phil knew someone who made kitchen furniture in Bulwell, Nottinghamshire. They made the cabinets for us and we bought 17-inch black-and-white Philips televisions for the screens. We tried to make our machines look

» Anyone for videogame tennis? Atari UK renamed its machine after the famous tournament.

» Big sideburns, big flares – Alistair goes peak Seventies on the *GT10* flyer.

as close as we could to an Atari *Pong* cabinet, but called our game *Wimbledon*, instead.

***Wimbledon*? Did you have to get some kind of official licence from the famous tennis club?**
Oh, we didn't ask permission [laughs]. They couldn't copyright the name 'Wimbledon' anyway because it's an area in London.

Good thinking! Did you get much support from Atari now you were manufacturing your own machines?
Yes, Al came over, more than once. We had no technical expertise so we were relying on a company called Panelwire Controls, based in Heanor, Derbyshire. They were acting as our consultants. We took Al to this company to check they were doing the right stuff. Fortunately, they had a guy there called Roy Ludlow and he was shit hot. He could've worked at Atari, he was that good.

Did you take *Wimbledon* to arcade trade shows to drum up business?
Yes, and that's when we realised there were other people making similar machines in England. I remember, there was a company in Burton On Trent [making *Pong* clones], and the rumour was that the mafia was involved. I was at a trade show at Alexandra Palace and saw all these guys get out of a stretch limousine, wearing dark glasses and with bulges under their suits…

> "Pong was easy to play and people were curious. Everyone wanted to try this new thing"
> Alistair Crooks

You decided not to ask them if they had an official licence from Atari, we imagine.
[Laughs] The thing is, we had assumed Atari had patents [on their games] but we found out that they didn't, or at least, they weren't watertight. There were companies starting up in the UK advertising these *Pong*-style games, too. We weren't on our own. We felt let down, like we had overestimated Atari, but in fairness to them, whatever we were experiencing, Atari was having it a hundredfold. It was a steep learning curve for everyone.

How many *Wimbledon* machines were you producing in England?
We had planned to make about 75 machines a week but we never got close to that number because our timing was crap. In January 1974, the price of a barrel of oil quadrupled. Then Arthur Scargill [future leader of the National Union Of Mineworkers] and his mates decided to blackmail the country and we ended up working a three-day week [a government policy which restricted electricity usage by non-essential industries to three consecutive days per week – Economics Ed]. Our overheads were going up, our business was going down. I think we only produced 200 to 300 *Wimbledon* cabinets in total.

You must have been worried about the future of Atari UK.
This is where a rift started to form between myself and Phil. He had blind faith in Atari and truly believed they were going to come out with the best thing since sliced bread. In the meantime, we were bleeding red ink [losing money – Business Ed]. Then a lifeline was thrown to us by Trusthouse Forte. They are known for hotels but also had a chain of arcades, pubs and clubs. They approached us in February of 1974 and asked us to build them 40 to 50 fruit machines a week. I thought, "Great, that will cover our overheads." The problem was Phil was not happy about gambling. It was his money, he was the main shareholder, so we didn't do it.

Did you consider importing other Atari titles of the time, like *Space Race* and *Gotcha*?
We didn't really get excited about those games. We were looking for another Atari exclusive as good as *Pong*. They brought out a football game which wasn't very good but one machine that really did give me hope was their *Gran Trak 10* racing game. They sent us the logic board and the kit, but not a full cabinet.

FIVE EARLY ATARI GAMES

Which do you think Atari UK should have brought to Britain?

PONG

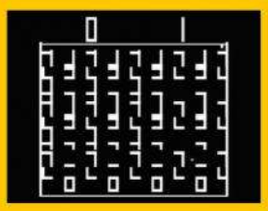
■ The videogame that introduced arcade videogames to the general public and the title that Atari UK launched with. It had no difficulty selling it to eager operators… but other British companies were starting to put out *Pong* clones and Alistair needed something new to sell – and fast.

SPACE RACE

■ Atari's second release is best described as a proto-*Frogger* with visuals inspired by Nolan Bushnell's first title, *Computer Space*. Steer your spaceship through an asteroid belt against the clock, which is fun for five minutes but you can see why Alistair wasn't impressed enough to bring it to the UK.

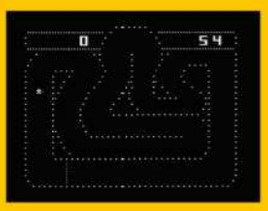
PONG DOUBLES

■ Atari UK did produce its own version of this four-player take on tennis. Advertised as "The New *Wimbledon*" in *Coin Slot* magazine, this provided four, two and single-player modes. Not to be confused with Nutting Associates' similarly titled *Wimbledon*, which had a colour display.



GOTCHA

■ The first arcade maze game, as one player chases a second through an ever-changing labyrinth, with a point awarded for a successful capture. Cabinets initially had controls resembling breasts, which makes us wish Alistair had licensed *Carry On Camping* and put Barbara Windsor on the flyer. Oo-er missus!



GRAN TRAK 10

■ The first overhead arcade racer, this was a real step forward from the simplicity of *Pong*. Offering a steering wheel, gear stick, brake and accelerator pedals, we can see why Alistair thought it could save his company – though technical problems with the game mean Atari UK may well have still crashed.

We designed our own [cabinet] as we were trying to go a bit more upmarket and not just produce machines for arcades. We didn't want it with cars up the side, so we did it in tasteful timber. Many locations didn't want something loud, screaming in the corner. In the States, everything was in your face, but in Europe, it needed to be done with taste.

You could see the market for a racing game over here?
When it arrived, I wet my pants. I spent the entire weekend playing it. I was into cars and here was a game with a steering wheel, pedals, the engine noise. I was fascinated! We put a machine in a Trusthouse Forte arcade in Oxford Street [London] in late-April of 1974. I went down there after it'd been on site for five days to see how it was going. The manager had been tipped off I was coming and when I arrived, there were five guys standing there wanting to see what time I could do on this machine [laughs]. I'd played the game hundreds of times because it cost me nothing to play but these guys were nearly as fast as me and I thought, "How much money must they have put into this machine to get this good?"

It sounds like you knew you had a hit on your hands!
I put the machine in the back of my Volvo station wagon and drove to Paris, then to Bingen am Rhein [in Germany], to Antwerp, Copenhagen and Stockholm, all on one trip, just to show this machine to the various operators in these cities. All of them thought it was really good.

You even produced your own flyer to promote the game.
Yes, but I had no idea I was going to be on it [laughs]. We got a local agent in Derby to do the flyer for us. They did work for JCB, which explains the yellow car you see on the flyer, a Ferrari 512. That car belonged to Anthony Bamford, who owned the company. The registration even says 512 JCB! I have no clue who the girl stood next to me is, but I look at it now and realise I was desperate for a haircut.

Why did you change the name to *GT10* for the European market?
I was heavily into motorsport and was really invested in this product, so I wrote the text [on the flyer] and thought '*Gran Trak*' was very American. It might have been OK for arcades but we were aiming upmarket. Ford were very successful with a car called the GT40 so we called our game *GT10* which I thought would ring a bell for Europeans who knew their motorsport.

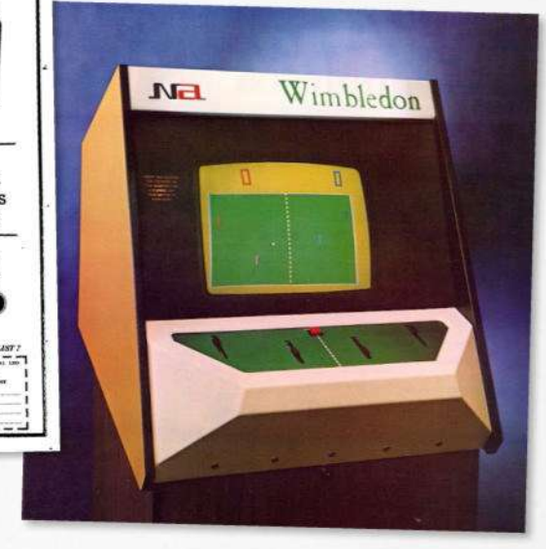
> "We called our game Wimbledon and no, we didn't ask permission from the tennis club"
> Alistair Crooks

Did the orders come flooding in?
Slowly but surely over the next three weeks, I started getting telexes from all the people I'd visited, telling me they had received an offer from a company called Kee Products, offering the same game but $100 cheaper. That's when I knew we couldn't compete, not in Europe, at least.

It sounds like that would be Kee Games, the company that Atari set up to get around exclusive distribution deals. You must have been in the dark about Kee Games really being part of Atari?
You're spot on. In fairness, though, they didn't come to the UK. They were only doing this in Europe. They weren't breaking any agreements… but it would've been nice to know we were competing with Atari!

Did you ever produce *GT10* cabs for sale in the UK?
When I started getting these telexes from Europe saying they had a better offer, I sensed

» Atari UK was not the only arcade manufacturer advertising its wares on British shores. Note Nutting Associates' *Pong* clone, also called *Wimbledon*.



ATARI UK MARK 2

It's not such a long way to Tipperary

■ Atari UK may have closed in October 1974 after barely 18 months in operation, but in 1978, Atari returned to Britain, establishing a manufacturing plant in Tipperary, Ireland. The Irish government was keen to attract foreign investment and its offer of tax breaks and subsidies meant Atari, now under the ownership of Warner Communications, chose this small, rural town to build some of its most iconic games. At its height in the early Eighties, the factory was producing 2,000 cabinets a month, so if you played on an *Asteroids*, *Missile Command* or *Centipede* machine in the UK or Europe back then, chances are it was made in Tipperary. The factory finally closed in 1998 and during its 20-year lifespan also produced cabinets for Namco and Midway, whether in partnership with Atari or when solely owned by those other arcade stalwarts. For more on Atari Ireland, see Tony Temple's excellent account, including many illuminating photos from the factory floor, at arcadeblogger.com/atari-ireland and listen to Kevin Hayes, managing director of Atari Ireland during its heyday, share his memories on episode nine of *The Ted Dabney Experience* podcast, co-hosted by your correspondent.

» A row of *Missile Command* cabinets during production at Atari's Tipperary factory. Photo courtesy of arcadeblogger.com

ATARI (UK)

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29A DRAYCOTT RD., BREASTON, DERBYSHIRE, ENGLAND

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SUNDERLAND
Telephone: Sunderland 58822

C. T. LEISURE
63 HEYWOOD ROAD
LEICESTER
Telephone: 0533 822162

» Atari UK announces the renaming of *Ping* to *Wimbledon* in *Coin Slot* magazine, July 1973.

Taylor to market TV game

LEICESTER distributor Mr. Colin Taylor has been appointed the first distributor of a new television tennis game, Ping, which has been launched on the home market by a new British associate company of the giant Atari Corporation of California.

Mr. Taylor will be handling the machine through his firm C. T. Leisure Equipment, of 63 Heyworth Road, Leicester.

He will be followed in due course by other distributors to handle sales in the South, the North and on the Continent.

He commented: "This is the best television tennis game I have seen so far. The main points are its reliability and the fact that it is British-built. Only the memory banks are being imported. This, of course, means that the price, at £625 plus V.A.T., is well below most of the others on the market".

The Sales Director of Atari (U.K.) Ltd., Mr. Alistair Crooks, told "Coin Slot": "We envisage a small number of distributors, each with a portion of the country to cover. Mr. Taylor was the first because he is a leading Midlands distributor and closest to our base in Derbyshire.

Full details of the new machine and the Atari organisation are on page 14.

• Atari Sales Director Mr. Alistair Crooks (nearest camera) going over the wiring diagram of the Ping machine with new distributor Mr. Colin Taylor.

» Alistair and Atari UK often featured in news stories in *Coin Slot* – here, he's explaining the workings of *Ping* to their new Leicester distributor.

we were doomed. This would've been about June 1974 and we were really desperate for business. I became totally disillusioned and walked away. I don't think any *GT10* cabs were produced after I left and Atari UK went into liquidation in October.

Was it an acrimonious split?
No, it was low-key, really. I'd come back from my European trip feeling optimistic and then one by one, all these potential customers politely declined. We'd been losing money for months and Phil wouldn't bend on his ethical concerns about producing fruit machines, which I respected. After agonising over the decision, I brought my expenses and salary up to date, parked the company Volvo in the factory and left my resignation letter on Phil's desk. The accountant requested that I sign over my 10% shareholding, which I did without seeking compensation.

» Alca's *Ping Pong* beat Atari UK's *Pong* (renamed *Ping*) to market by a few months, making it the first coin-operated videogame manufactured in Britain. You can play both at Arcade Archive in Stroud. Photo courtesy of Alex Crowley (pictured).

Did you ever see Phil again?
Not until three years later, totally by chance. My wife and I were on holiday in Monterey and there was Phil, just walking down the street towards us! He had moved to California and I went back to his house for a drink. It was fine… there was more sadness than acrimony.

You went on to have a long and successful career producing promotional merchandise for big-name brands like John Player Special, Suzuki, Rolls Royce and Caterpillar. How would you sum up your short time running Atari UK?
I'd say, "Steep, steep learning curve." It put me in good stead for what was to come and actually made me quite conservative. I could see money couldn't just buy you success. You need more than that and we weren't in charge of the technology. I have no hard feelings towards Atari. They were going through the same learning curve, multiplied by thousands. I've kept in touch with Al ever since. He's a good friend and a very modest chap.

If Atari UK had managed to survive for a year or two more, when massive hits like *Tank* and *Breakout* came to market, do you think you could have shared the huge success Atari would enjoy in the late-Seventies and early Eighties?
I have thought about that but neither Phil nor I had any experience in the business. In hindsight, we should've diversified and took on franchises for other arcade companies and if we'd stuck to marketing and distribution and not gone into manufacturing… I mean, that factory became an albatross around our necks. But Phil was totally focussed on Atari. He thought they were going to rule the world. And he was right!

Thanks to Dr Alan Meades, author of the fantastic *Arcade Britannia: A Social History Of The British Amusement Arcade*, and Alex Crowley, proprietor of Arcade Archive, for their invaluable help with this article.

AN INTERVIEW WITH NOLAN BUSHNELL

Atari's cofounder on the origins of Atari UK

Alistair vividly recalls the initial meeting he and Phil Smith had with you which led to the formation of Atari UK. What were your first impressions of these two Englishmen?

I thought they were an odd couple but they seemed enthusiastic and capable. I was impressed with their ambition, plus we didn't really have anything to lose.

You agreed to the deal over a steak dinner, even though they had no prior experience in the coin-op business.

I liked the idea because we were up to our eyeballs in the US, so anything I could do to expand the market was attractive. I do remember they told us we couldn't use the name *Pong* in the UK because it was slang for a bad smell.

Any recollection what the business arrangement was, money-wise, for you to supply them with *Pong* machines?

I have no clear recollection. I know we were selling *Pong* machines for just under $1,000 in the US and I think we were charging somewhere around $500 for just the *Pong* boards.

Were you surprised when Atari UK went into liquidation in October 1974?

The business had changed and we were having our own issues because the runaway success of *Pong* was not repeated with other games.

Do you think if they had survived a year or so longer, they could have shared in the huge success Atari would enjoy later in the decade?

Once we hit our stride with the other games the whole structure of the business changed, so yes, I'm sure they would have succeeded had they stuck it out.

The Last Blade: Beyond The Destiny

DESTINED FOR ANOTHER COLLECTOR

» NEO GEO POCKET COLOR » 2000 » SAURUS

I'm not the kind of person who sells games very often – while I'm becoming more open to the idea now, historically it's something I've only done when it has been a financial necessity. I'm especially loathe to do it when it's an expensive game that I may not be able to easily obtain again. Given that, plus my love of fighting games and my affinity for the Neo Geo Pocket Color, it might be surprising that *The Last Blade: Beyond The Destiny* is a game that is no longer present on my shelves.

It certainly wasn't an easy decision to make, as the game is utterly fantastic. The game retains the excellent weapon-based combat of the Neo Geo originals, and even among the excellent fighters on SNK's handheld, *The Last Blade* stands out for its beautiful presentation and depth – the game starts out following the story of the original game, but as characters are unlocked it transforms into a version of the sequel. It has plenty more to unlock too, with scrolls that alter battle parameters and even a couple of minigames. Unfortunately, complete European boxed copies aren't easy to come by, as the game was released just before SNK withdrew from international markets and recalled all Neo Geo Pocket Color stock.

So what was it that convinced me to get rid of *The Last Blade*? Ironically, it was the unlockable scrolls that I just praised. I had unlocked all but one of them, and I should have been able to get the last one but some kind of bug prevented it from becoming available to purchase. I couldn't bear the thought of having to start over from the beginning and needed the cash, so the game soon ended up on eBay. Thankfully, SNK saw fit to include it in *Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection Vol 1*, so there's a much more affordable way to have it in my collection now.

» This month we play WayForward's Advance Wars reboot, dive into a giant Mega Man compilation, enjoy some hardcore shmup action with R-Type Final 3 Evolved and watch The Super Mario Bros Movie

» [Switch] Battle scenes look great in motion with neat animations. Just be aware of the odd framerate drop.

Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** SWITCH
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £49.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

Despite debuting in the West in 2001, Intelligent Systems' *Advance Wars* never really took off in the same way its *Fire Emblem* series did. Here's hoping then that WayForward Technologies' *Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp*, an update of the GBA classics *Advance Wars 1* and *2*, gets the franchise some much-deserved attention.

While both games are immediately playable, newcomers are advised to not play *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* due to it featuring heavy spoilers about *Advance Wars*' finale. Both games focus on Andy, a young inexperienced CO in the Orange Star army who finds himself caught up in a war with Cosmo Land's other countries. Along the way he'll meet rival COs, master his CO Power and team up with fellow Orange Star COs Max and Sami, all under the tutelage of Nell, Orange Star's experienced leader.

Each campaign takes roughly 14 hours to complete and largely follows the same structure. Levels take place across a detailed map and you'll need to obliterate the opposing force or achieve a quick victory by capturing its HQ, with points being awarded for how quickly and efficiently you complete each level. Occasionally you'll be required to capture a certain number of cities or finish a battle in a strict amount of days, but usually success requires completing the first two objectives.

Things start off relatively simple with access to only a few types of units. But as your adventure continues you'll encounter many new unit types, from helicopters and rocket launchers to bombers, jets and cruisers, all of which require new strategies and greatly open up how each battle

» [Switch] CO Powers range from healing troops to moving certain units twice and they're accompanied by excellent character animation.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Intelligent Systems released *Famicom Wars* for Nintendo's Famicom in 1988 as a Japan exclusive. Several sequels followed, typically for Nintendo's handhelds, but they too never left Japan. The series made its Western debut in 2001 as *Advance Wars* for the GBA and was followed by an immediate GBA sequel and a further DS adventure. A standalone DS game, *Advance Wars: Dark Conflict* arrived in 2008 and there's also a spin-off series called *Battalion Wars*.

» [Switch] *Re-Boot Camp* is fantastic value for money, with plenty of additional challenges found in the War Room.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARREN

Castle Of Shikigami 2

We received the Japanese version ahead of Red Art Games' European release and I've been having great fun with it.

NICK

Nuclear Blaze

I have a real affinity for fire-fighting games like *Burning Rangers* and *Fire Heroes*, and this 2D effort is short but very sweet. It's a genuinely fun experience.

» [Switch] In addition to new COs, *Black Hole Rising* introduces new units and a secondary CO Power that takes longer to charge but is far more effective.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

FIRE EMBLEM

▼ SOMETHING NEW

WARGROOVE

» [Switch] Different terrain offers different types of cover which can grant huge benefits during a skirmish.

plays out. Opposing COs will be introduced as well, each with their own unique skills and CO Powers, so Grit is a master of long-ranged attacks, while Drake is a formidable naval opponent. In the early stages of the game capturing neutral or enemy cities will allow your units to restore any damage they've received if they camp on them. As play continues, Bases, which let you generate new units for a certain amount of funds, enter play. Each day's funds are based on the number of cities you own, so sending out infantry to capture more ensures you always have better building options.

Mechanically *Re-Boot Camp* is virtually identical to the original GBA games, a testament to how great those adventures still are. Aside from the fact everyone is now voiced, the big changes WayForward has made include being able to replay completed levels, the ability to reset your entire turn and an option to instantly attack enemies. Maps can be zoomed in and out at will and it's now possible to fast-forward battles and your opponent's turn. While the original Field Training introduction has been scaled back, additional hints from Nell in the early moments of each level mean you'll never be at a loss as to how new units or mechanics like Fog Of War work.

Of course, the biggest change the games have received is in how they look, with the original chunky pixel art being replaced with a new cartoony style. While we've seen some disappointment about the new aesthetics we actually like them as they make all the COs far more characterful and the animation (particularly during battles) looks great. Yes, battles show the odd framerate drop and it would have been nice to switch to the original sprites, but it's certainly not a dealbreaker.

The original two GBA games were always good value and the same is true here. Outside of the two campaigns, the Design Room lets you create and share your own custom maps, Versus lets you play against up to three other players on a single Switch or multiple Switches via local communications, while Online lets you play against anyone in your Friends List (they need to also own *Re-boot Camp*). The War Room also returns and lets you battle the AI on new maps using either *Advance Wars* or *Advance Wars 2* settings, while Hachi's Shop lets you spend the coins you earn in battle on maps, music, art and COs for use in the War Room, Versus and Online.

Re-Boot Camp is a solid update that newcomers and fans alike are bound to enjoy. The AI doesn't feel quite as challenging as in the original GBA games and the sequel can feel like retreading old ground at times, but there's no denying that WayForward's update offers superb value for money.

» [Switch] While some levels require a specific CO, you'll typically choose between Andy, Max and Sami, who all have their own strengths and weaknesses. Max is a real brusier, for example.

» [Switch] Jets can cover a wide area but are only good for attacking other airborne units.

In a nutshell

Its graphical makeover may leave some cold and it's not as challenging as the originals, but *Re-Boot Camp* remains a great update of two classic GBA games which are now getting expensive to own. Don't miss it.

» Score **87%**

PICK OF THE MONTH

R-Type Final 3 Evolved

» **System:** PS5 » **Buy it for:** £49.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Granzella is back with the third game in the *R-Type Final* series – except that it's not quite what you'd expect. *R-Type Final 3 Evolved* is in fact an updated version of *R-Type Final 2*, although it has to be said that the updates do feel pretty substantial. As well as getting *R-Type Final 2* in full, you'll get the first wave of DLC for that game (though not all of it, which feels mildly stingy) and a brand-new PS5 exclusive campaign featuring seven stages created by Kazuma Kujo. If you've already played the PS4 version of *R-Type Final 2*, you can transfer your saved data.

This is clearly aimed at committed fans first and foremost, as it's essentially a very generous extra helping of the *R-Type Final* formula. Fans will delight in the callbacks to previous games and quickly settle into the rhythm of trying, failing and eventually memorising each stage. The difficulty level can be pretty punishing right from the outset, but each stage has checkpoints and you can change ships when you continue – though each death is accompanied by the traditional loss of power-ups.

The new stages are well-designed and largely more graphically refined than the old ones, which is greatly appreciated since *R-Type Final 2*'s stages can still look quite bland. The soundtrack is excellent throughout, and is a real highlight.

Granzella is promising to add more to the game – certain features, including the multiplayer Competition mode and the R Park social space, weren't fully implemented at the time of writing and are scheduled to be completed with updates. Veterans of *R-Type Final 2* may question the asking price for what is essentially a large update, but if you're a committed shoot-'em-up fan who somehow missed out on *R-Type Final 2* the first time around, this is an easy recommendation.

» Score **81%**

» [PS5] The new campaign sees you tackling more planetary environments than outer space ones.

» [PS5] The enormous battleship stage is back, this time taking place in the Arctic sea.

Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS4, PC
» **Buy it for:** £49.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

Mega Man's RPG spin-off series is the focus of this collection, comprising six Game Boy Advance games with four of them having *Pokémon*-style alternate versions. Capcom has done a commendable job in adding online play, implementing the old e-Reader cards and providing extra features like the Gallery mode. Minor quibbles include the mixture of high-resolution text and low-resolution pixel art, as well as the poor display filter option. These games were released in rapid succession from 2001-2005 so they're all similar to each other, but there's a lot of meat on the bone here for anyone who gets hooked on their unique battle system.

NICK THORPE

» Score **75%**

The Super Mario Bros Movie

» **Studio:** Universal » **Cast:** Chris Pratt, Charlie Day, Anya Taylor-Joy, Jack Black

Effectively an origin story to introduce gaming's most famous plumber to cinemagoers, Illumination's new movie is a lot of fun. Granted, said fun largely comes from the delight of recognising classic *Mario* iconography, rather than good actual jokes, but the in-jokes that do land hit hard and it's all enhanced by some entertaining setpieces. Pratt and Day are fine as the titular brothers, but it's Taylor-Joy's Princess Peach and Black's Bowser who linger in the memory long after the film finishes. Mario's extended family feels a little pointless, it relies far too much on nostalgia to do the heavy lifting, while the plot itself is forgettable and flimsy. However, if you're just looking to be wrapped up in a 90-minute nostalgia blanket, this will not disappoint.

DARRAN JONES

Xeno Crisis

» **System:** N64 (tested), GameCube » **Buy it for:** £55, £30 (GameCube), £15 (ROM image)
» **Buy it from:** shop.bitmapbureau.com

Bitmap Bureau continues to port its excellent twin-stick shooter, with the latest offerings being for the N64 and GameCube. For those unaware, *Xeno Crisis* is an arena shooter where you mow down enemies, whilst rescuing survivors. There's a nice selection of weapons, some truly punishing bosses and it's all held together by an astonishing soundtrack and gorgeous pixel art. The N64 version is superb, playing similarly to the slick Dreamcast release. An option to fully customise the controls would have been nice and we've had a few issues with our high scores not always saving to the Controller Pak, but they don't diminish the quality of this stunning game.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **85%**

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THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

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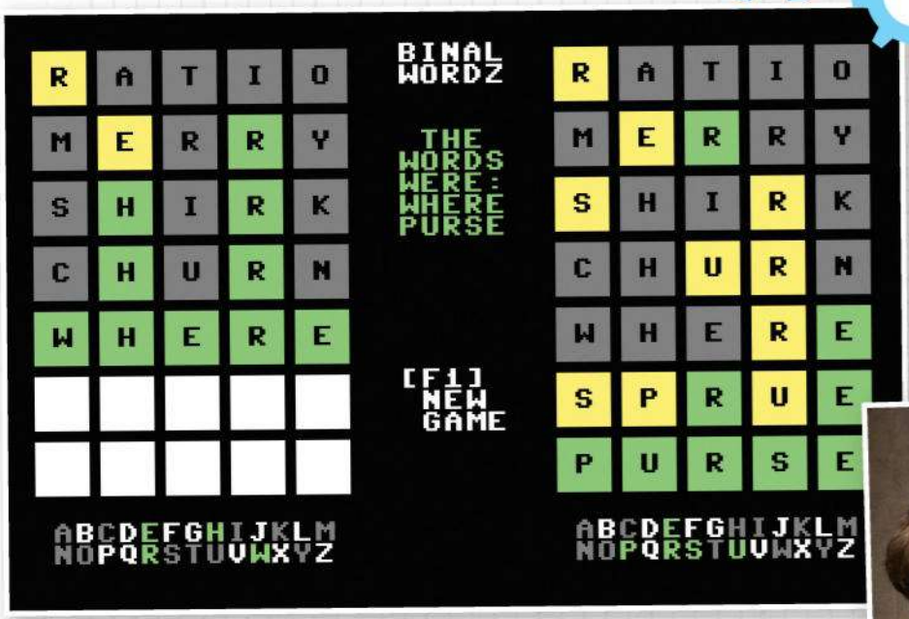


<!--- ANTOINE FANTYS AND HIS FAMICOM (LEFT), WITH ROY FIELDING IN HIS TRAVELLER'S TALES HAT (RIGHT). --->

<INTRO> HOMEBREW IS A MIXTURE OF LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD. THIS MONTH WE HAVE REMAKES OF A PUZZLE GAME AND ARCADE, PLATFORM, STRATEGY AND RPG GAMES THAT WOULD HAVE WOWED REVIEWERS IN THE EIGHTIES, AND A FEATURE ON HOW A MODERN WORD GAME INSPIRED MANY CODERS. WE ALSO HAVE A YOUNG FRENCH DESIGNER JUST STARTING HIS GAME CAREER. VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE, SO TUCK INTO THIS GREAT RANGE OF FLAVOURS </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

WORDLE WONDERS

<INTRO> JOSH WARDLE'S VIRAL HIT WORDLE HAS INSPIRED HOMEBREW CODERS TO BREAK OUT THE GREEN AND YELLOW SQUARES. </INTRO>

<BODY> **"At the peak, I would do *Wordle* and *Quordle* every day," says Antoine Fantys who created *Nordle* for NES and Famicom, with physical cartridges currently on sale.** "I think it's a fun challenge to 'de-make' games for old systems. The game is written in assembler so I only need Notepad for writing code, while assembling is done through NESASM3."

Antoine's version still had challenges though. "The dictionary has 12,897 words, exactly how many words [*Wordle*] contained before a certain newspaper bought the game," he says. "I talked to retro developers on Discord porting *Wordle* about how they compressed the dictionary, and we managed to cook up a nifty compression scheme. Every word is compressed down to three letters (5 bits each), and an extra bit to check if it's a solution word as well. The whole thing took up a few KBs less than half of the game, which sits at 64KB."

Antoine's game also supports the Famicom BASIC keyboard. "*Nordle* is the first after-market game to support this peripheral, and upon first trying it out on real hardware, the keyboard did not work properly. After reverse-engineering a commercial game from that era, I figured out that you're supposed to wait a few cycles before attempting to read from the keyboard."

Indie developer Cout Games now has a hat-trick of variants – *Wordz*, *Binal Wordz* and *Trio*. "I jumped on the impulse to be the first to make one for the C64 community," he says. "The simple logic and screen design for the game was perfect for our 8-bit computer. The toughest part would be using BASIC V2 with its limited string functionality." As the names suggest, *Binal Wordz* sees you solving two words at once and *Trio* ups that to three. "The games were built using CBM Studio, *Wordz* and *Binal Wordz* have around 2,300 words and *Trio* about 4,000 uncompressed words."

VARIANT VERBS

WORDLECPC
(Amstrad CPC)

< The bold tiles, multiple dictionaries and fast word checking on this version are highly impressive – although it is prone to picking obscure words. />

WORDLE
(Atari 2600)

< "The Atari 2600 version looked amazing," says Antoine and we agree. The display showing the letters you have guessed is very helpful. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

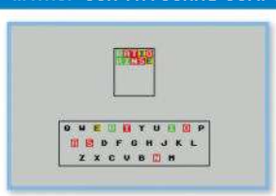
Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [NES] NORDLE RECREATES THE GREEN AND YELLOW BLOCKS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GUESS, AS USED ON SOCIAL MEDIA. --->

<!--- [PLUS/4] ONE OF THREE PLUS/4 GAMES SO FAR, TEDDLE HAS THE MOST COLOURFUL DISPLAY. --->

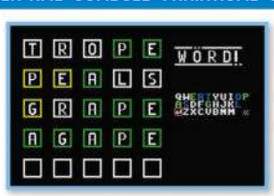
"I used to play *Wordle* on my phone every day for a month or so," says Roy Fielding, creator of the humorous *Turdle* for C64. "I did a turd-related take on it because the C64 Craptastic 4KB competition was pending. So, I drew a turtle with a turd for a shell, inspired by my favourite word game, *Bookworm* by PopCap." The dictionary has 64 slang words for a certain bodily function. "A few were suggested by an ex-colleague called Roger Bacon. Each time you play, it shuffles the word order." Roy isn't finished with *Wordle* either. "The Spectrum version I am collaborating on – that version is playable, but I still have music and a loading screen to do for that. My coder is probably sick of waiting. I have toyed with the idea of making a PICO-8 version too. Scoop… I am making *Birdle*, a more child-friendly game based on bird-related words" [Sold – Ed]. It appears that *Wordle* fever is still strong with coders. </BODY>

<INTRO> OUR FAVOURITE COMPUTER AND CONSOLE VARIATIONS ON WORDLE SO FAR </INTRO>



GUORDEL
(ZX Spectrum)

Although the display is quite small, the large English and Spanish dictionaries on this Spectrum version are excellent and quick to check.



WORD!
(MSX)

An entry for the MSXDEV 2022 competition, this features four different dictionaries to challenge you (English, Dutch, Spanish and Swedish).

AMIWORDLE
(Amiga)

Playing in Workbench, *AmiWordle* can be set to limit you to one puzzle a day – just like the original version of *Wordle*.

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: Retream's latest is the point-and-click adventure *Ring Around The World* (pictured), requiring 1MB of Chip RAM and Kickstart 1.3 or higher. It's free to download at bit.ly/ringaroundtheworld-amiga but Simone asks for charity donations to victims of violence.

Atari ST: Rainbow Bytes released a demo of the *Minesweeper*-inspired *Bombwatch*, for 1Mb ST/STE, with four graphical styles. Give it a try at bit.ly/bombwatch

Atari XL/XE: Enjoy classic falling tetromino action in *Mytris* for Atari 8-bit users by visiting bit.ly/mytris-atari8

BASIC: The 2023 10 Liner competition is in full swing with entries for many machines. Find out more at bit.ly/basic10-2023

Game Boy: Wild Haggis Gaming has released the hilarious *Taskmaster – The Highly Anticipated Video Game*. Play as celebrity contestants and complete the bizarre tasks set by little Alex Horne. Give it a whirl by visiting bit.ly/taskmaster-gameboy

Mega Drive: PCSD Games has released the latest demo of its *Resident Evil/Biohazard* demake. Scary frights can be found over at bit.ly/bioevil-demo2

PET: Jeff Minter recreated the long-lost PET version of *Deflex*, where the player uses mirrors to deflect the ball. You can see if it has been worth the wait by visiting bit.ly/deflex-pet

PICO-8: Johan Peitz's *Hellgineers* sees you building bridges across fiery chasms to help the demons cross. Windows, Mac, and Linux versions can be found at bit.ly/hellgineers

Various: Inspired by *Enduro* and *The Great American Cross-Country Road Race*, Dr Floyd's *Enduro 3* sees computing pioneers in a road race across Europe. You'll find it at bit.ly/enduro3

Taskmaster Software revived its *Sam Boon* series of text adventures and released new versions across multiple formats. You can name your price and get them from taskmastersoftware.itch.io

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

SJ AND DALE

<INTRO> SJ AND HIS FATHER DALE (SJ GAMES) CHAT TO US ABOUT CREATING THE CUTE NES PLATFORMER SKATE CAT </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: FRANCE WEBSITE: BIT.LY/SKATECAT-NES – DEMO DOWNLOAD FORMAT: NES PREVIOUS GAME: SKATE CAT (NES) WORKING ON: DALE – CHIBI MONSTER BRAWL (NES) />

HOW DID YOU START MAKING GAMES?

<SJ: I have always wanted to make videogames and when I learned that my dad knew how to make them, I immediately wanted to make one too. So we started having small NES game creation workshops together (one to two hours, some weekends or during holidays). It's a very fun activity. />

<!--- SJ PROUDLY HOLDS A SKATE CAT CARTRIDGE.. --->

<Dale: I really love the NES. It was my childhood console. In 2018, while I was bedridden for several months for health reasons, I discovered NESmaker. />

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING NESMAKER?

<Dale: NESmaker allows me to create NES games without needing a lot of knowledge in assembly language programming. It's perfect for beginners but also great for going deeper, as you can change everything. With one click, it allows you to transfer the game created directly to a NES via a USB adapter. />

<SJ: NESmaker is also very convenient for drawing characters, monsters, and animations, and designing the screens for different levels directly. Everything I need is included in the tool. />

WHAT INSPIRED SKATE CAT?

<SJ: It all started when we got a cat, we noticed that she played a lot with my mini-skates. Then I had the idea of making a game where you play as a cat on a skateboard. The idea slowly grew in my head and I started to draw some characters and monsters, and the sketches of the story, which served as a basis for our work sessions. />

HOW DID YOU GET A BATCH OF CARTRIDGES MADE?

<Dale: I have some NES dev cartridges that allow me to test our games. Then when the game is finished and it interests enough people to consider releasing a physical edition, I contact my publisher friend Broke Studio who takes care of everything, cartridges, boxes, labels and manual. This is how it went with *Skate Cat*, a print of 200 copies should be ready in a few days. />

<!--- [NES] UPGRADING YOUR BOARD LETS YOU JUMP ON ENEMIES. --->

<!--- [NES] THE CAT TOY SERVES AS A CHECKPOINT WHEN YOU TOUCH IT. --->

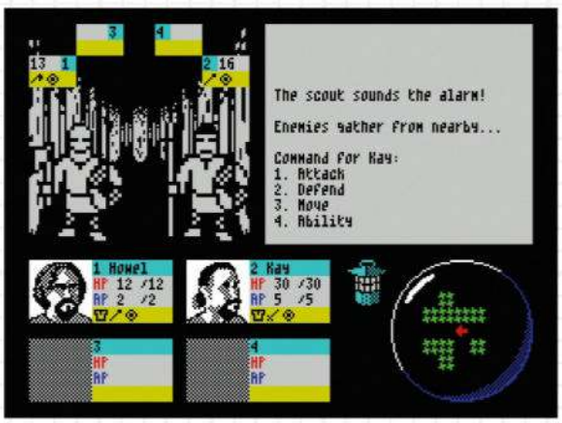
DATA BURST

WYCHEWEALD

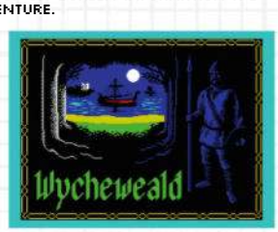
<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K/128K) CREDITS: RED ZEBRA PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: BIT.LY/WYCHEWEALD />

<BODY> **When raiders loot and pillage his village, Howel is left for dead.** The kind Forester takes Howel in and tends his wounds, before sending Howel and his friend Kay on a quest to find Raedwulf, his missing ward – the raiders are still in the area and are hunting for something. This sets up an interesting first-person RPG in the style of *The Bard's Tale*. The view of your surroundings scrolls smoothly and there's a pleasing graphical effect as you move. *Wycheweald* also features a mini-map and auto-map that will help you keep track of your surroundings. When combat inevitably happens, the outcome will be affected by the positions of your party, their weapons and their combat choices. For example, defending while holding a shield will reduce the damage taken, while using a spear can reach the back row of attacking enemies. Experience points earned from combat allow the characters to gain vital skills, while looted pennies can buy healing items from the characters encountered – including a very important witch. In a nice touch, lighting your lamp while exploring the dark forest can draw in more enemies. The dramatic 128K music is missing on the 48K version, which also has much shorter dialogue due to memory restrictions. Although the controls do take a little getting used to, *Wycheweald* remains an engrossing and well-presented RPG on both formats that will certainly keep you occupied. </BODY>

SCORE: 87%



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] DESPITE LOTS OF ON-SCREEN INFORMATION IT'S ALWAYS EASY TO FOLLOW THE ADVENTURE.



NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [AMSTRAD GX4000] SOHDE TEAM'S SOH TACTICS GX WILL PLEASE ANYONE THAT LOVES A GOOD TURN-BASED BATTLE. --->

<!--- [AMSTRAD GX4000] HERE'S A HANDY OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD. THERE'S STILL A LOT OF LAND LEFT FOR YOU TO CONQUER. --->

SOH TACTICS GX

<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD GX4000 (CARTRIDGE IMAGE) CREDITS: SOHDE TEAM PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/TACTICS-GX4000 />

<BODY> **One or two brave knights travel to conquer a mysterious continent in this enjoyable strategy game.** The continent features five areas: Last Outpost, Desert Of Eternity, Eerie Wastelands, Ancient Forest and Ice Palace, each of which have six missions and a boss battle. Each knight chooses a blade, which offers different strengths and ranges of attack and the player must use the terrain to their advantage, wiping out all the enemies as they go. This turn-based isometric strategy game features great presentation, as well as good graphics and rousing battle music. For fans of *Final Fantasy Tactics* and similar titles this is very enjoyable (but rather tough, particularly the first battle). Get past this and you'll discover a unique release for the format . </BODY>

SCORE: **81%**

<!--- [NES] THERE'S A LOT OF CRATES IN THE WAY, BUT A LITTLE BIT OF THOUGHT WILL SOON LEAD YOU TO THAT COVETED FLOPPY DISK --->

<!--- [NES] IF YOU ENJOY SOKOBAN CLONES YOU'LL FIND FORCE BOT TO BE AN ESSENTIAL ADDITION TO YOUR COLLECTION. --->

FORCE BOT

<INFO FORMAT: NES CREDITS: ERIC SCHAFER, CHRIS PARKER, DAVID FROESE, TAKUMI GRAINGER, ESTLIB, TUI PRICE: TBC WEB: @FORCEBOTNES ON TWITTER />

<BODY> **Funded by Kickstarter, this pays homage to the classic puzzle game *Sokoban*.** Your robot must collect a floppy disk from each level – but in his way are lots of crates. Some levels are just about reaching the disk, while others require you to push enough crates into the holding slots (making the crate and slot disappear). The graphics are good, and the included tunes really suit the game. While the Beginner level is not taxing, Medium and Advanced will certainly stretch your brain. Digital downloads and a second cartridge batch are currently being considered. </BODY>

SCORE: **84%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> THERE'S GOLD IN THAT THERE SPECTRUM – THANKS TO JAMIE BRADBURY'S GILLIGAN'S GOLD REMAKE </INTRO>

<BODY> **"I always remember Ocean for doing great games, but I found the original *Gilligan's Gold* to be a stinker," Jamie tells us.** "I wondered if I could do better with modern tools." Jamie's chosen tool is Jonathan Cauldwell's MPAGD (Multi-Platform Arcade Game Designer). "I don't feel MPAGD was really made with this sort of game in mind, so that is the challenge," Jamie adds. "The focus is on tight gameplay. Everything has to work so the player has confidence that Gilligan is going to do what you tell him. The scripting is quite complex as there are several game mechanics that all have to work together."

Was there a particular challenge Jamie faced? "The trickiest bit so far was the minecarts," he admits. "They must travel between screens regardless of what the player is doing. But generally, the game has so much going on." That also means Jamie's game needs a little more time. "I hope to finish it this year, and have it released for Christmas! It's slow because I am doing everything myself – loading screen, music, menus, and game." </BODY>

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] SUPPORT FOR ULA+ GIVES EXTRA COLOURS DURING THE MANIC MINE RAIDING. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

OUT ON THE OPEN OCEAN

We reminisce about the former publisher

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [Amiga] *Batman* wasn't just a game that sold to Amiga owners – it drove new Amiga purchases.

With Ocean Software being the subject of a feature this month, it felt like a good time for the team to reminisce – after all, the company used to be a titan of the games business in this part of the world, and we all played its games.

NICK

So, it has been 25 years since the Ocean brand disappeared from the shelves of game stores. Did you guys realise it had been that long?

DARRAN

Not at all, but to be honest I've been writing professionally about retro games for the past 20 years and Ocean has been a big part of that so my perception is a little warped.

TIM

I'd kind of forgotten about Ocean until I joined the mag. Hadn't had to think about it for ages. But I played a load of its games on the C64.

DARRAN

What sort of games, Tim?

TIM

The Transformers, *Short Circuit*, *Green Beret* – actually just looking through the feature I played so many of them, it might be quicker to list the ones I didn't play. The first one was probably *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. Kill count? Two joysticks.

NICK

The C64 was my first encounter with Ocean too – I was given games like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and *Hunchback II* with mine.

DARRAN

I'm pretty sure the first Ocean game I played was *Gilligan's Gold* and *Kong* on my mate's Spectrum, which would have been fairly early. I found myself picking up its games whenever I could for no other reason than I loved the films and arcade games it was making. Was anyone else a fan of its movie tie-ins?

> "By the time the 32-bit consoles came out just about everything was done by external developers"
> NICK THORPE

NICK

I actually don't have many of them – I think the only one is *Navy Seals* for the GX4000, which is one of the most brutally tough games I've ever played.

TIM

Sort of, but some of them were a bit naff – *Cobra* for example. But I did enjoy doing the two-joystick cheat to get away from the gunship in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. I do wonder what the two *Clive Barker's Nightbreed* games were like.

DARRAN

See, I liked *Cobra*, particularly on the Spectrum. I've got fond memories of *RoboCop*, *The Untouchables* was decent, *Platoon* was great and I loved *Jurassic Park*, although it was massively let down by not having a save feature. I know Ocean put out a lot of arcade conversions under the Imagine label, but I think several of the conversions under its own label were excellent, like *Operation Wolf* and *Chase HQ*, providing you didn't own the C64 version of course. Anyone else agree?

NICK

Chase HQ on the Spectrum was pretty amazing, yeah. Ocean definitely did some good ones, *Pang* on the GX4000 was excellent and it published Graftgold's conversions of *Rainbow Islands*.

TIM

Yeah, those were great. My brother and I used to play *Operation Thunderbolt* together on the Amiga. "Take what comes and hit them with double," was printed on the side

of the box, it's a good philosophy and one I try to live my life by.

DARRAN

I don't think I ever got around to playing *Thunderbolt*, but *Operation Wolf* was superb. I've also got fond memories of the *We Are The Champions* and *The Magnificent 7* compilations that were released. Ocean just seemed to have its fingers in a lot of pies. Look at things like *Head Over Heels*, *Where Time Stood Still* and *The Great Escape*, really original and still timeless today.

NICK

Yeah. Of course, what helped is that the company was big enough that its publishing went well beyond what in-house developers could do – *Where Time Stood Still* and *The Great Escape* were both by Denton Designs, for example.

DARRAN

That's right, *Head Over Heels* was Jon Ritman and *Wizball* was Sensible Software, but I'd imagine most associate them with the Ocean name, which just shows the power of branding. Did you play any of Ocean's later console games, Tim?

TIM

Did Ocean actually develop console games? I thought it just published them at that point. *Worms* I guess? Is it worth mentioning *Jersey Devil*?

DARRAN

I'm pretty confident it did, but not to the extent it was during the home-computer period. I'm guessing it was probably getting too expensive to do everything internally. What do you think, Nick?

NICK

Yeah, Ocean did some games internally like *The Addams Family* games for the Mega Drive, but by the time the 32-bit consoles came out just about everything was done by external

» [C64] *RoboCop* is a great example of the game design that typified Ocean's movie licences.

developers. The PlayStation version of *Worms* is one of the games I associate most strongly with Ocean though, just because of that nice FMV logo scene with the dolphin.

DARRAN

I remember Ocean being a huge deal during the 8-bit days and would eagerly wait to see what its big Christmas game was, but *Jurassic Park*, *RoboCop* and *Mission Impossible* aside, I don't recall owning many of its later console games, which is a shame as its back catalogue looks quite interesting.

TIM

Of course, Ocean would be nothing with out Martin Galway's loading music. Has any band ever covered it?

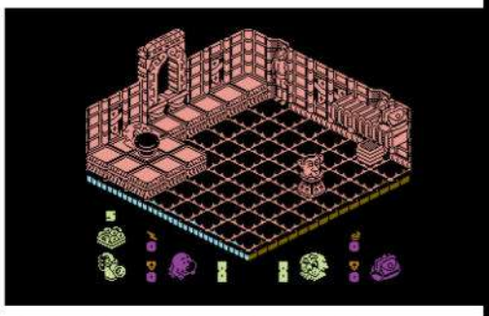
DARRAN

Not that I know of, but someone probably should as it's an absolute banger, as is Jonathan Dunn's *RoboCop* theme which made it onto an Ariston advert!

NICK

There are actually a fair few out there, but the metal one that came up as the first result is definitely Darran-unfriendly. Far too loud!

» [SNES] *Jurassic Park* was a great licence to have, and one of Ocean's internally developed games.



» C64] Though famed for its licences, Ocean published great original games like *Head Over Heels*.

» [Saturn] Team17's *Worms* was the biggest publishing success of Ocean's early 32-bit console days.

READERS REACT

What are your favourite Ocean games?

'Horace' by Paul Helman

No one game in particular but the *Ocean Loader* music, especially *Ocean Loader 2*, that time signature change around 45 seconds is amazing!

Neil Henderson

The one that first springs to mind is *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. I wrecked many a joystick playing that!

Codetapper

Cabal on the C64 was a fantastic Ocean conversion. Superb graphics, a great difficulty curve, nice bosses, and immense fun destroying all the scenery.

Martin Sønderby Lund

Batman on the bread bin was a big title for me. One of the first games I heard with that iconic *Ocean Loader* tune, one of the first games I saw where they 'broke through' the border of the screen (the main game screen) and one of the first games I ever beat.

Stacey King

1988 was my favourite year for the Spectrum and Ocean games. On +3 disk most evenings after school, but before I went out with my mates, I would play *Target: Renegade*, *RoboCop* and *Operation Wolf*. This was a perfect and very satisfying hour of gaming and chill out time for me.

Kurisu Jones

Mr Nutz was a gorgeous 2D platformer on the SNES. It stood out in an era when 2D platformers were a dime a dozen and the likes of *Donkey Kong Country* and *Earthworm Jim* were around, so you know it was something special to behold.

zx_spectrum_30

Operation Wolf was a brilliant conversion and I also love what they did with *RoboCop*.

Daniel Betts

It might not be the best game they made but *Waterworld* on the SNES stands out for its incredible soundtrack, the map music is one of my all-time favourites.

RAM OK ROM OK

I know *Wizball* gets all the love but for me the sequel *Wizkid* is delightfully nuts and never fails to make me smile.

Binni Erlingsson

The *Operation Wolf* ZX Spectrum conversion was quite incredible... and also really improbable that they managed to translate a lightgun game so perfectly to the Spectrum, where a huge majority played the game with keyboard or joystick.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

THE HOBBIT

"A rare edition of *The Hobbit*, published in the USA by Addison Wesley for IBM/PC. It is one of my favourite games. I participated in a program about Veronika Megler produced by Great Big Story and was nominated for an Emmy."

AMOUNT PAID: £100

ZX SPECTRUM ISSUE 1 WITH ISSUE 1 EXPANSION MEMORY

"This 16K Issue 1 has serial number 09403 and is virtually new, it looks like it was released yesterday. It has a memory expansion also marked as Issue 1. A wonder."

AMOUNT PAID: £700

ROBOCOP 3

"*RoboCop 3* also has its Spanish version in a large box, and it is just as uncommon as the UK version."

AMOUNT PAID: £90

A TRULY DINAMIC COLLECTION

Our latest collector has an impressive set of 8-bit classics

This month's collector, Jesús Martinez del Vas, not only has an impressive collection, but also works on the Spanish edition of Retro Gamer. "I think the first step in collecting was the decision to keep my old Spectrum games and my Nintendo Game & Watch machines," he tells us, going on to say he's kept all his systems since.

Look through Jesús' gorgeous collection and you'll notice two companies are particularly prolific: Ultimate Play The Game and Dinamic Software. "Ultimate was a magical company," Jesús tells us. "Everything was steeped in mystery and fantasy. Their originals are precious. Dinamic knew how to sell their games in Spain like no one else, and surrounded themselves with great programmers and graphic artists."

While he clearly loves both software houses, Jesús collects titles from many other popular developers of the time and has over 2,000 games. He's still looking for certain Ultimate games though. "I would like to get some Interface 2 ZX Spectrum cartridges I am missing, and some Spanish versions for Amstrad," he admits. "And of course, an autograph from the Stamper brothers, if possible on an original unpublished game of *Mire Mare*…"

Despite owning numerous consoles, Jesús' main focus is home computers, particularly the Spectrum. "The ZX Spectrum was my first computer and I think that marks you," he says. "I would have loved to live that phenomenon while being in the United Kingdom. The companies showed enormous creativity, with constant releases every week. The covers were beautiful, with well-designed boxes. *Deus Ex Machina* had an interior poster that was a crazy design, while artists like Bob Wakelin and David Rowe made legendary works of art."

If you're wondering why so many of the images Jesús has shared look like they're on tables, it's because he often takes his collection on the road. "I run the website elmundodelspectrum.com with my friends Alejandro Ibáñez, Juan Francisco Torres and Javi Ortiz," Jesús says. "We have been doing a podcast for 11 years and we take our games and computers to retro videogame events all over Spain. We have also written two books." A podcast interview with Jon Ritman led to Jesús chatting to the legendary coder via email, which resulted in Jon writing a prologue for Jesús' second book. Jesús, who also illustrates, later presented Jon with one of his illustrations at a RetroMadrid event (see right).

So before he returns to the Spanish edition of **Retro Gamer**, what 8-bit collecting advice does Jesús have for readers? "It is always advisable to first think about what your main interests are and try to focus on them," he says. "You also have to select the material you want to collect and think about economic limitations and the space available at home! When I look at my collection, I think that I have not followed any of my own advice: one day my family is going to kick me out of the house."

BIO

NAME:
Jesús Martínez del Vas

LOCATION:
Madrid, Spain

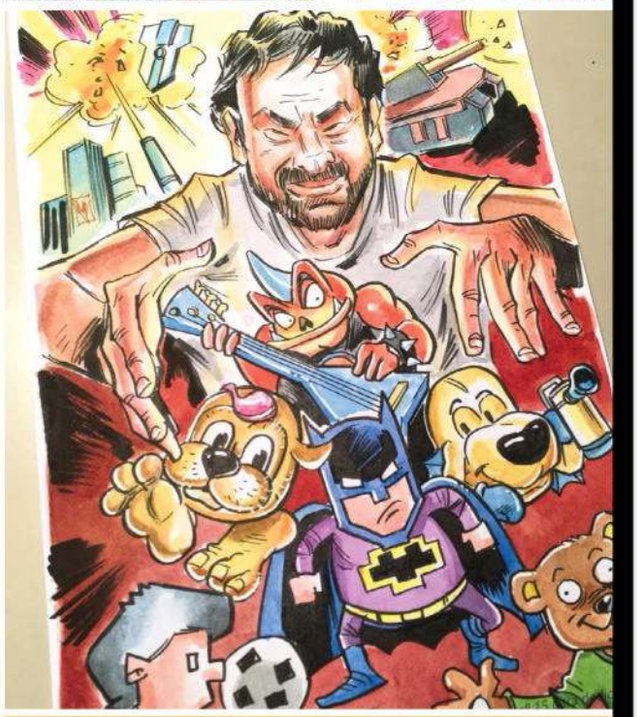
ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£12,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
ZX Spectrum

FAVOURITE GAME:
Knight Lore

TWITTER:
@yedaijamao

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

LA ABADÍA DEL CRIMEN

■ "A Spanish Filmation adventure that adapts *The Name Of The Rose*. You have to try it, it is an awesome game! This is a rare disk edition in a big plastic case for the ZX Spectrum 128K."

PAID: £320

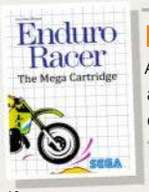
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

Link's first 3D adventure remains a true classic and thankfully PAL versions are plentiful. You can get a complete copy for **£67** while cartridges are a third of that price. It's a different matter for the US release though, as high demand for it in the UK sees complete copies fetching as much as **£132** whenever they appear.



ENDURO RACER

As Darran mentioned, Sega's isometric racer is still cheap and you can get a complete UK copy for under **£20.** Japanese copies on the other hand can go as high as **£60.**

CRUIS'N USA

If you want to experience the first *Cruis'n* game on a home console complete PAL copies currently fetch up to **£52.** The US copy is similarly priced, although you'll need to consider import charges.

WIZBALL

Yes we know it's by Sensible Software, but many see *Wizball* as quintessentially an Ocean game. Double-cassette case versions of the C64 game can hit **£30,** while *The Hit Squad* variant reaches **£19.** Alternatively, get it with seven other games on Ocean's *The Magnificent Seven* compilation for **£24.99.**

BONANZA BROS

We like the Mega Drive adaptation of Sega's coin-op and so do you, with complete PAL copies reaching **£34.** The Japanese edition is a little cheaper at **£22,** but remember potential import charges.

BLAST WIND

Feeling flush? You can buy this Saturn exclusive for **£240.** If you want it in complete condition with the hard-to-find obi strip you'll be paying as much as **£405!**

DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY

Like last month's *Jaws Unleashed* there's a big disparity between the PAL and NTSC variants. Complete Xbox PAL copies top out at **£30,** but the US version can reach **£100.** That's a big difference in price.

HOW MUCH?!

EARTHBOUND-

This SNES heavyweight continues to fetch mind-blowing prices on the second-hand market. A recent copy in exceptionally good condition sold at a Buy It Now for a staggering **£1,899.** Thank goodness it's available on Nintendo's Switch Online service.

Prices correct at time of print

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

Darran has a newfound interest for Sony's PlayStation 3

've always enjoyed Sony's third games console, even if it didn't get off to the strongest start. Hideously overpriced at launch with few games I was interested in, and with plenty of missing features like Trophy support, it reminded me of spending a fortune on an expensive house, only to find that the living room wasn't finished, and you were still waiting for the toilet to be installed. I largely bought a PS3 as it came with a built-in Blu-Ray player and when Imagine Publishing launched *HD Review* in 2007 I grabbed a US system (Blu-Rays were usually region locked) so I could write that magazine's import section.

That machine has long since bricked thanks to the original console's tendency to suffer from the infamous Yellow Light Of Death, but I still own my ugly super slim model which I purchased along with EA's *Dead Space 3* in 2013. I'm hoping nothing ever happens to this particular machine as it has a number of US digital games on it which I can never re-download as I've been locked out of my account and have no way to access it.

In fact it was the potential closure of the digital PS3 store back in 2021 that reignited my interest in Sony's console in the first place. Reading horror stories about updates being lost forever and being fearful of losing my own digital games (many of which are now delisted) I went to my local CEX and purchased around ten games, with the most expensive being a copy of *The Last Of Us* for £6. I also created a new US account and grabbed a few titles like *Rain*, *Battle Princess Of Arcadias* and *Infamous: Festival Of Blood* because they had no physical releases (that I knew of).

What surprised me was just how cheap many PS3 games were, with big hitters like *Assassin's Creed* and *BioShock* being available for just a few quid. As I often do when I become interested in a system, I headed to YouTube and typed in 'PS3 Gems' which led me down a further rabbit hole and saw my collection quickly expanding. It's probably worth pointing out that I have roughly 70 promo games for the PS3 as well as over 200 PSN titles and yet for some reason I was still picking up games I already owned.

'm a sucker for a good manual and as nice and compact as PS3 promos are they don't display well and they're not interesting to look at. I decided to go all in on Sony's machine and some great videos by Digital Foundry's John Linneman about PS3 games that supported full 1080p led me to making several other purchases, including *Rayman Legends* and *Origins*, as well as persuading me to revisit games I already owned.

> "What surprised me was just how cheap many PS3 games were"
>
> **DARRAN JONES**

I soon discovered that while the vast majority of PS3 games are dirt cheap, a smaller number are already rising in price. What's particularly interesting is some of these titles are often more expensive than their Xbox 360 counterparts, despite the fact that the Xbox versions typically run better when played on an Xbox Series X. It was at this point that I was glad I still owned *Afrika* and *Aquanaut's Holiday* because you won't find the former for under £100 or the latter for less than £400!

Of the games that are rising in price, it's rather telling that many of them are HD updates of PS2 classics. These include Naughty Dog's *Jak & Daxter* trilogy, the two *God Of War* collections and Konami's bundle of *Silent Hill 2* and *3*. The higher prices make sense when you consider that they're the easiest way to play these classic games on modern TVs and that titles like *Silent Hill 2* are rapidly rising in price on the original PS2. I'm interested in *The Ratchet & Clank Trilogy*, because a large number of games in the series appeared on PS3 and I've not played any of them.

There's plenty of weird oddities on the machine as well that I've yet to play, and *Folklore*, *Initial D Extreme Stage* and *Tekken Hybrid* are all on my radar. While it was a case of FOMO that led to me returning to the PS3 I'm glad it happened because it reminded me of just how many gems on the system there are.

ON THE HUNT

THE PS3 GAMES I'M STILL AFTER

THE RATCHET & CLANK TRILOGY
I do own the digital versions of the first three games, but I would prefer the actual physical version for my collection.

3D DOT GAME HEROES
I'm sure I had a promo of this at one point but I don't appear to own it now. It is a fun *Zelda* clone that I would love to be reacquainted with.

STRIDER
Yes, I know better versions of this are available on PC, PS4 and Xbox One, but Japan was the only region to get a physical release and I love physical games.

FOLKLORE
I mistakenly thought this was a turn-based RPG and ignored it on release, but YouTube videos suggest it's something that I'd really enjoy.

THE LAST GUY
Like *Strider* and *Rain*, this is another PSN game that had a physical release in Japan. I'd love this, but it's getting quite pricey now.

SEVERAL FRANCHISES STARTED ON THE PS3 AND SOME OF THEM ARE STILL GOING TODAY.
[PS3] WEIRDLY, GAMES LIKE LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEIR XBOX 360 COUNTERPART'S SO KEEP THAT IN MIND.
ALL OF THESE GAMES ARE RAPIDLY RISING IN PRICE, WITH AFRIKA AND AQUANAUT'S HOLIDAY BEING PARTICULARLY EXPENSIVE.
[PS3] I'M A LOT MORE CAUTIOUS ABOUT BUYING THIRD-PARTY GAMES LIKE MIRROR'S EDGE AS THEY OFTEN RUN BETTER ON XBOX SERIES X.

[PS3] IT'S A FORGETTABLE GAME, BUT IT'S EXCLUSIVITY TO PS3 MEANS GOD OF WAR: ASCENSION IS BOUND TO RISE IN PRICE.
THE PS3'S HD COLLECTIONS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE POPULAR. THIS IS THE BEST WAY TO EXPERIENCE ICO IN MY OPINION.
A SELECTION OF THE 70-ODD PROMOS I STILL HAVE. MANY OF THEM DON'T FEATURE COVERS LIKE THESE ONES.
[PS3] A FEW PSN GAMES LIKE TOKYO JUNGLE DO EXIST IN PHYSICAL FORM BUT THEY'RE ALREADY BECOMING VERY EXPENSIVE.
ALL THESE GAMES HAVE BEEN UPGRADED AND RUN BETTER ON MODERN CONSOLES SO I'LL PROBABLY SELL ALL OF THEM.
A SELECTION OF MY EXCLUSIVES. DUCK TALES MAKES THE CUT AS IT HAD A PHYSICAL RELEASE HERE.

PS3 ESSENTIALS

Readers share their favourite games for Sony's third console

Rev Mike Jones
Dishonored blew me away on PS3. I loved it from day one and it's still one of my favourite games!

TeeBee
Siren: Blood Curse. Still a great horror game and a brilliant addition to the *Forbidden Siren* series.

Game Smart Yardley
As far as exclusives go, before the remasters, it would have to be *The Last Of Us*. Fantastic characters, captivating storytelling, great gameplay and tense moments make this game legendary and unforgettable not just for PS3 but gaming in general.

David Springate
Metal Gear Solid IV: Guns Of The Patriots. What a journey. It's one of those games that really shows the power of the PS3. It's a monster. May my PS3(s) live long!

Erbkaiser
Portal 2. While it of course also exists on PC, I first played it on the PS3 and enjoyed every second of the story. The game is perfectly made for the controller.

GC
I'll go with *Dragon's Crown*. Such a fresh air in a generation that was filled up with shooters. I loved the narration-like story, over-the-top characters, and the overall art style. Tons of fun.

MiamiJan
Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger, an awesome shooter with brilliant storytelling and arcade-like gunplay.

MikeH
LittleBigPlanet. Cuteness overload and a great local multiplayer game that anyone can enjoy.

Paul Darbyshire
It's not a PS3 exclusive or anything but I'd choose *Remember Me*. It's probably the prettiest-looking game of that era and the world, story and characters are incredible.

Simon Pike
I really like *MotorStorm: Apocalypse*! Great spectacle, fun and aggressive racing, and, surprisingly, a really entertaining story.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I very much enjoyed reading the article by David Crookes about game-making tools and the time he made his own game. When I was a kid I was fascinated with the prospect of being able to make a computer game and, not having any coding skills to speak of, I loved tinkering with level editors and various construction kits.

During the pandemic, with a bit more time on my hands and watching my nine-year-old son Nate code games for school in Scratch and Purple Mash, I began wondering if it would be possible to make a game for my beloved ZX Spectrum. Two months later, with the help of Jonathan Cauldwell's MPAGD (Multi-Platform Arcade Game Designer) and a lot of very clever and helpful people on the internet, my son and I made our first-ever Spectrum game.

The best thing about it has been the absolute thrill of seeing other people play our games on Twitch and Youtube. A couple of our games have even featured in the hallowed pages of **Retro Gamer**, thanks to Andrew Fisher's fantastic Homebrew section. By the way, it has to be said that Andrew is doing a great job carrying on the legacy of the much-loved and missed Jason Kelk.

I strongly recommend anyone out there who has ever harboured a secret desire to make a game, to just go out there and do it! Whatever your platform of choice, there's never been a better time to have a crack, the necessary resources and folk to steer you right could be just a quick internet search away.
Cheers,
Davey Sloan

Thanks for sharing your homebrew journey with us, Davey. It sounds really satisfying and we're glad the magazine has helped inspire you to code. We look forward to seeing your games in future issues along with any other readers who are similarly inspired.

» [ZX Spectrum] *The Man With The Golden Joystick* is just one of Davey's games and can be found at sloanysoft.itch.io

» You can find Retro World on Twitter (@retroworlds) and Instagram (derbyretroworld).

HUNTING FOR RETRO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I visit Derby city centre semi-regularly as my mother lives nearby, and I always pop into CEX for a browse. But as I exited CEX on my last visit, I happened to walk down a street I don't usually take, and came across Mobile Games Exchange, which had a surprisingly decent collection of retro gaming items itself.

However, a greater treat was discovered when I walked a little further along the same street and found Retro World (retro-world.co.uk). Inside was a treasure trove absolutely bursting with classic games, hardware, merch and old issues of gaming and manga magazines.

It was a great experience and I'd recommend Retro World to anyone near the Derby area. It got me thinking: how many other hidden gems like this are there in our towns and cities? I'd love **Retro Gamer** to do a feature on the best retro games retail destinations across the UK, perhaps including interviews with some of the owners?
Keep up the great work,
Henry Petrie

This is a great idea, Henry, especially as our own local retro store, Insanity Gaming, recently closed down. We'll try to find similar stores around the country and put a feature together later in the year. If any readers have recommendations we'd love to hear from you.

RETRO REGRETS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm sure we all have our retro gaming regrets and I was just wondering what yours were? I still have nightmares about mine; I traded a massive sports bag of Saturn stuff in for a Xbox 360 at launch along with a bunch of games. I was not far from a complete set of PAL games, which included such gems as *Panzer*

» A selection of the PAL Saturn games Paul used to own. No wonder he has regrets, there are some expensive classics here.

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Dragoon Saga, *Burning Rangers*, *Guardian Heroes* and *Deep Fear*, but at the time I wanted that shiny new console! Who knew I'd come to regret it many years later! Now I'm a retro hoarder and slowly rebuilding that Saturn collection, I'll do it one day! I swear! Honest!
Regards,
Paul Adams

Thanks for writing in, Paul. We all have gaming regrets. Darran's mentioned trading in his huge NTSC SNES collection for an Amiga 1200, Nick regrets not buying Darran's copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* when he had the opportunity, while Andy wishes he never got rid of his Mega-CD copy of *Snatcher*.

BEYOND VIDEOGAMES

Hey **Retro Gamer**,
In a recent nostalgic haze I was reminiscing about the old Tomy Kong Man game. Clearly inspired by *Donkey Kong*, it was like a vertical version of Screwball Scramble, and loads of fun. I see there was even a Sonic The Hedgehog-themed version released too!

It made me wonder if you had ever done any articles looking at quirky toys, games and merchandise based on or inspired by retro videogames? I remember there was a *Street Fighter II* board game, for example, and I'm sure there's countless other treasures out there. If you think it might be relevant for your mag, I'd love to see it.
All the best,
Tim

Thanks for writing in, Tim. Funnily enough we covered a bunch of board games based on videogames all the way back in issue 93 and that included *Street Fighter II*. We hope you can track down a copy of it.

» Ex-**Retro Gamer** writer Stuart Hunt and Darran enjoy a game of *Frogger* from issue 93.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Selling games

With nearly 1,500 physical games in his collection, Darran has decided that enough is enough and he's looking to sell some of them off. He's planning to get rid of 300 games, and is hoping to shift them at one of the incoming trading fairs. Nick (who doesn't normally like selling anything) has also finally decided to let a few items go, although not to the same level as Darran.

Your say

» [Switch] It goes without saying that you're all very fond of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *Breath Of The Wild* has entranced many of you as well.

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite The Legend Of Zelda game?

Oliver Roderick
Breath Of The Wild unseated my long-time favourite *The Wind Waker* in 2017. It's the *Zelda* game which actually looks like what nostalgia tells me all the others looked like.

Pepper
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past. It was such a big leap in graphical design from the original on the NES, with excellent gameplay improvements and a beautiful overworld. It offered challenge, and expanded on the exploration. It's one I could go back to any day and enjoy.

David
The Wind Waker, because it oozes charm and personality from every pixel. Just existing in its world is a joy.

Sanny Syberfeldt
There are probably objectively better games in the series, but honestly nothing can recapture the feeling of playing through the original right after its Western release. Still very enjoyable to play today, and I don't think it's all nostalgia.

Lee Abrahams
A Link To The Past. I had played the NES games previously but this one just blew me away with the lush graphics and cleverly layered worlds.

Pierre Coppi
Breath Of The Wild. I love every single *Zelda* game, but *Breath Of The Wild* managed to evolve and/or subvert literally everything about the franchise. It felt both fresh and nostalgic. A masterpiece.

Emmanomic Weissis
My eight year old says *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap* (Game Boy Advance) because it is fun to play, the bosses are tougher than they seem and the landscapes look cool!

S Scott
Ocarina Of Time, an absolute masterpiece and it still holds up. I had to read a guide while in a games store for the Water Temple though!

chodelicious
Ocarina Of Time hands down. One of my happiest childhood memories was playing through it with my mum reading the guide. I must have replayed it hundreds of times since release and it never fails to make me think of my mum and the time we spent together playing it.

Henry Henry
Link's Awakening. My dad bought me and my brother each a Game Boy with *Link's Awakening* and we played it together night after night in the garage while he worked on a car.

supatyp
A Link To The Past (SNES) because that was the biggest step forward in the history of *Zelda*.

Chris Bellis
Ocarina Of Time was a real game-changer for me. It came bundled with another six games when I bought an N64, but I didn't touch the other titles for a solid month.

Zeitensand
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time on the N64. The first and only videogame that made me cry.

retro GAMER

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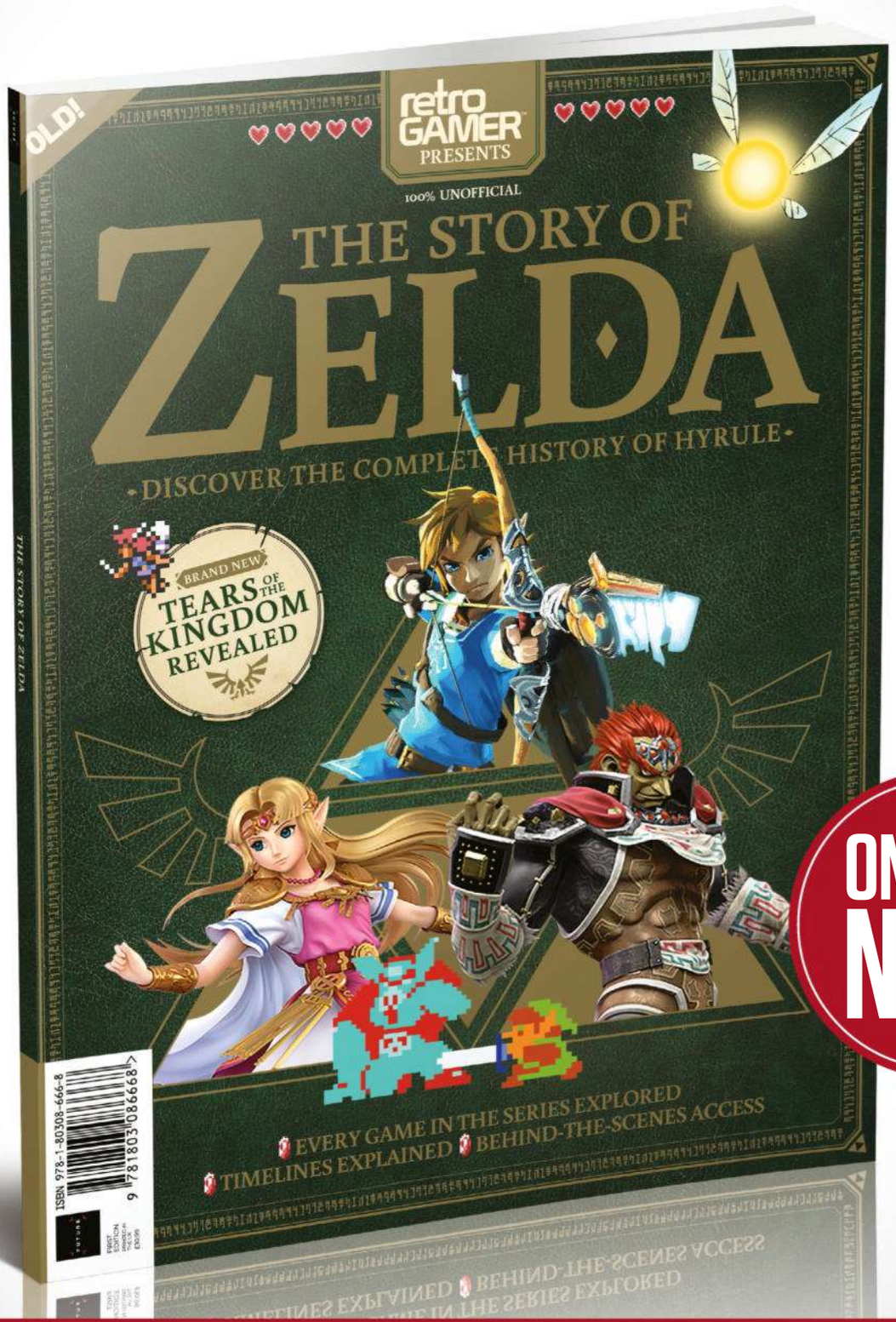

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Def Jam: Fight For NY

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***Def Jam Vendetta* completely passed me by on release, mainly because playing as super-stylised rappers and hip-hop stars didn't appeal to me.** That all changed with the sequel however, as it became a staple of lunchtime gaming sessions while working on *games™*.

I still don't know to this day if my fellow team members genuinely enjoyed rap music and thought highly of the likes of Bubba Sparxxx, Ludacris, Henry Rollins, Xzibit and Sean Paul, or just enjoyed throwing them in front of subway trains, but joining them for chaotic four-player death matches was great fun and it led to me grabbing my own copy of the game at a local car boot.

Seeing that *Fight For NY* has the full support of its huge roster of stars, they all look in ridiculous tip-top condition and many of them have physiques that would intimidate He-Man. For all the artistic licence used though, the game itself is highly entertaining and sees you navigating the underbelly of New York as you do battle against a variety of rapping and hip-hop superstars.

It's all deliciously silly stuff, but what holds *Fight For NY* together is the genuinely solid fighting engine found underneath all the loud music and muscular torsos. This is no surprise as Aki Corporation worked wonders with its numerous wrestling games on the N64 and *Fight For NY* has a truly flexible engine that caters for numerous fighting styles. It's further enhanced by silly over-the-top Blazin' Moves that let their owners dish out truly punishing attacks.

As satisfying as *Fight For NY*'s Story mode is, the game really comes alive with friends, particularly when fighting in more intimate arenas where the crowd can join in as well, and it becomes a surprisingly brutal brawler that rewards skill as well as endurance. Being a licensed game it's highly unlikely this will ever get re-released, so grab it now while it's still relatively cheap. You won't regret it. ✱

ENDGAME

KURUKURU KURURIN

» Did you know that this game wasn't released in North America back in the day? That really proves that you can't miss something you've never had – here in the UK, we had riots in the streets when the sequel Kururin Paradise was confirmed as being a Japanese exclusive. Oh yes, this game has an ending, doesn't it? Let's take a look at that.

01

» Finally, Kururin has gathered up all of his siblings. This is quite a difficult task for us in real life, without trying to pilot spinning objects through mazes, so we can really sympathise with the bird here.

02

» Kururin reports his progress to what appears to be his mother, apparently neglecting to mention the status of the girls. What the heck, Kururin? They were in just as much danger! Bloody misogyny.

03

» The thing is, we're not actually sure that this is really Kururin's mother. While our mums aren't questionably localised like this game, they don't typically call their children "big brother". Do yours? Hope not.

04

» Everyone's together though, and that's the important thing. The younger members of the family group were convinced to actually look toward the camera with the judicious use of an iPad showing *Cocomelon*. We use such tactics with our tiny human relatives.

05

» And now Kururin and his clan walk off into the sunset, safe in the knowledge that they won't have to do anything like this again, unless they somehow lose all the siblings again. And really, who would be careless enough to manage that twice?

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

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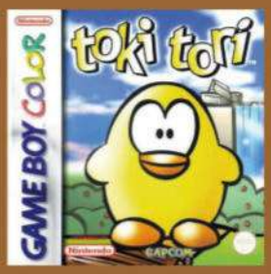

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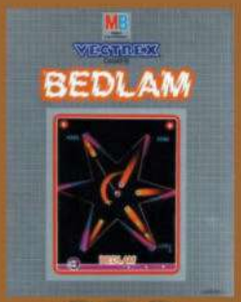

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